Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

JANUARY 1955
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THE TUNNEL UNDER THE WORLD
By Frederik Pohl

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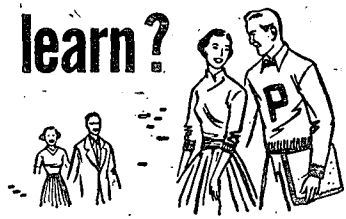

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JANUARY, 1955 VOL. 9, NO. 4

Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!

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YOURS FOR A DIME!

LAST month's editorial attempted to show—with rather more levity than I feel—how disheartening it is to slog through thousands of dreary manuscripts per year to find the 130 or so that are genuinely worth publishing.

How do we break up the trunk-to-tail parade and set each writer off on his own path of exploration? I don't know, but I'm trying so hard that I would wish I hadn't thrown away that truss, if I had a truss to throw away.

All right, let's up with the ink-stained sleeves and have at it, shall we? Writer or not, you'll be interested, I think, because I intend to toss off — after due examination — an idea that I guarantee could have sold, just to jolt would-be contributors out of their maddening lock-step.

Readers habitually ask writers, "Where *do* you get your ideas?" The honest answer would be, in the case of the chain-gang scribes, "I see them somewhere and they come to me in a flash."

This idea I have in mind— I'll tell you *exactly* where it came from:

It came from a cereal box.

Like most good Americans, I obediently grit away on the dried bread crumbs called breakfast food, meanwhile gazing with bleak eyes at the gaudy boxes they come in, noting vacantly the Bronco Joe nite-lite compasses, the spaceship rings with compartments for secret messages, and the rest, all to be had by sending in a box top and a coin.

Premiums!

Where did they start? How far have they come since then? By contrasting the present with the past, what influence *might* they have on the future?

For the research on these questions, my fond thanks to Evelyn E. Smith . . . and a bit of regret, too, for she could have made such a beautifully inventive story out of the subject of premiums. Still, if it shows imitative writers how to go about getting ideas, it's worth the considerable sacrifice.

Probably the first company to offer premiums was B. T. Babbitt, who stopped selling soap by weight from long slabs, and wrapped a lithograph in each package, thus making two important innovations. The date was 1851—just over 100 years ago— and now *more than one billion dollars'* worth of merchandise is given away or sold at less than cost per year!

Listen to these statistics:

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Thirty per cent of all china ware, 15 per cent of all enamel ware and 10 per cent of all aluminum ware manufactured in this country are sold or given away annually as premiums!

The amount of balloons, guns (from Old West to Futuristic), airplane kits and such bedazzling items for children is almost incalculable. *The New Yorker* once ran a cartoon of an advertising man's dream: a TV announcer holding up a cereal box and yelping, "Look, kids! All premiums . . . no cereal!"

Crackerjacks undoubtedly originated the custom of packaging prizes, but the idea has bloomed so hugely that high-power companies exist solely to think up, sell, manufacture and service youth industries.

In the adult trade, durable goods and jewelry are the two most popular premiums. Ice cream companies induce stores to sell their brand by offering tables, chairs, freezers; brewers give bars electric signs, radios and now TV sets; Fuller Brush salesmen hand housewives free brushes to lower sales resistance.

By purchasing only items that give profit-sharing coupons, you can literally furnish a whole home. Of course, it would take years and you may smoke and soap yourself to death, but it can be done.

In most cases, the sponsor's profit is good will alone. Thus, a 25c locket liquidates itself as follows: cost of jewelry, 16½c; federal tax, 4c; mail-handling charge, 2¾c; stamp, 1c; box, ½c; grief, ¼c. Total, 25c.

There are three principal methods of distribution:

Free Offer—mail-in request; store-visit gift; demonstration premium.

Combination Offer—over the counter; redemption station; loading deal (premiums given to dealers at no extra cost for ordering certain quantity).

Purchase Privilege—box tops, labels, coupons, punch card, etc.

Toys, jewelry, household items, cars, store equipment, sporting goods . . . all of it beginning with a simple litho wrapped around a cake of soap . . . grown to a $1,000,000,000-a-year giant in a single century!

The impact on our economy and buying habits has been enormous. Imagine what would happen if that rate of growth continued! Who'd need money? Before you leap up with an answer, consider this: Cigar-store coupons were used as legal tender in many U. S. towns during the depression!

"Where *do* you get your ideas?" From everywhere—including cereal boxes. Peel those eyes!

—H. L. GOLD

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The Tunnel Under The World

By FREDERIK POHL

Pinching yourself is no way to see if you are dreaming. Surgical instruments? Well, yes — but a mechanic's kit is best of all!

Illustrated by EMSH

ON THE morning of June 15th, Guy Burckhardt woke up screaming out of a dream.

It was more real than any dream he had ever had in his life. He could still hear and feel the sharp, ripping-metal explosion, the violent heave that had tossed him furiously out of bed, the searing wave of heat.

He sat up convulsively and stared, not believing what he saw, at the quiet room and the bright sunlight coming in the window.

He croaked, "Mary?"

His wife was not in the bed next to him. The covers were tumbled and awry, as though she had just left it, and the memory of the dream was so strong that instinctively he found himself

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searching the floor to see if the dream explosion had thrown her down.

But she wasn't there. Of course she wasn't, he told himself, looking at the familiar vanity and slipper chair, the uncracked window, the unbuckled wall. It had only been a dream.

"Guy?" His wife was calling him querulously from the foot of the stairs. "Guy, dear, are you all right?"

He called weakly, "Sure."

There was a pause. Then Mary said doubtfully, "Breakfast is ready. Are you sure you're all right? I thought I heard you yelling—"

Burckhardt said more confidently, "I had a bad dream, honey. Be right down."

IN THE shower, punching the lukewarm-and-cologne he favored, he told himself that it had been a beaut of a dream. Still, bad dreams weren't unusual, especially bad dreams about explosions. In the past thirty years of H-bomb jitters, who had not dreamed of explosions?

Even Mary had dreamed of them, it turned out, for he started to tell her about the dream, but she cut him off. "You *did?*" Her voice was astonished. "Why, dear, I dreamed the same thing! Well, almost the same thing. I didn't actually *hear* anything. I dreamed that something woke me up, and then there was a sort of quick bang, and then something hit me on the head. And that was all. Was yours like that?"

Burckhardt coughed. "Well, no," he said. Mary was not one of these strong-as-a-man, brave-as-a-tiger women. It was not necessary, he thought, to tell her all the little details of the dream that made it seem so real. No need to mention the splintered ribs, and the salt bubble in his throat, and the agonized knowledge that this was death. He said, "Maybe there really was some kind of explosion downtown. Maybe we heard it and it started us dreaming."

Mary reached over and patted his hand absently. "Maybe," she agreed. "It's almost half-past eight, dear. Shouldn't you hurry? You don't want to be late to the office."

He gulped his food, kissed her and rushed out—not so much to be on time as to see if his guess had been right.

But downtown Tylerton looked as it always had. Coming in on the bus, Burckhardt watched critically out the window, seeking evidence of an explosion. There wasn't any. If anything, Tylerton looked better than it ever had before: It was a beautiful crisp day, the sky was cloudless, the buildings were clean and inviting.

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They had, he observed, steam-blasted the Power & Light Building, the town's only skyscraper—that was the penalty of having Contro Chemical's main plant on the outskirts of town; the fumes from the cascade stills left their mark on stone buildings.

None of the usual crowd were on the bus, so there wasn't anyone Burckhardt could ask about the explosion. And by the time he got out at the corner of Fifth and Lehigh and the bus rolled away with a muted diesel moan, he had pretty well convinced himself that it was all imagination.

He stopped at the cigar stand in the lobby of his office building, but Ralph wasn't behind the counter. The man who sold him his pack of cigarettes was a stranger.

"Where's Mr. Stebbins?" Burckhardt asked.

The man said politely, "Sick, sir. He'll be in tomorrow. A pack of Marlins today?"

"Chesterfields," Burckhardt corrected.

"Certainly, sir," the man said. But what he took from the rack and slid across the counter was an unfamiliar green-and-yellow pack.

"Do try these, sir," he suggested. "They contain an anti-cough factor. Ever notice how ordinary cigarettes make you choke every once in a while?"

BURCKHARDT said suspiciously, "I never heard of this brand."

"Of course not. They're something new." Burckhardt hesitated, and the man said persuasively, "Look, try them out at my risk. If you don't like them, bring back the empty pack and I'll refund your money. Fair enough?"

Burckhardt shrugged. "How can I lose? But give me a pack of Chesterfields, too, will you?"

He opened the pack and lit one while he waited for the elevator. They weren't bad, he decided, though he was suspicious of cigarettes that had the tobacco chemically treated in any way. But he didn't think much of Ralph's stand-in; it would raise hell with the trade at the cigar stand if the man tried to give every customer the same high-pressure sales talk.

The elevator door opened with a low-pitched sound of music. Burckhardt and two or three others got in and he nodded to them as the door closed. The thread of music switched off and the speaker in the ceiling of the cab began its usual commercials.

No, not the *usual* commercials, Burckhardt realized. He had been exposed to the captive-audience commercials so long that they hardly registered on the outer ear any more, but what was coming from the recorded program in the

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basement of the building caught his attention. It wasn't merely that the brands were mostly unfamiliar; it was a difference in pattern.

There were jingles with an insistent, bouncy rhythm, about soft drinks he had never tasted. There was a rapid patter dialogue between what sounded like two ten-year-old boys about a candy bar, followed by an authoritative bass rumble: "Go right out and get a DELICIOUS Choco-Bite and eat your TANGY Choco-Bite *all up.* That's *Choco-Bite!*" There was a sobbing female whine: "I *wish* I had a Feckle Freezer! I'd do *anything* for a Feckle Freezer!" Burckhardt reached his floor and left the elevator in the middle of the last one. It left him a little uneasy. The commercials were not for familiar brands; there was no feeling of use and custom to them.

But the office was happily normal—except that Mr. Barth wasn't in. Miss Mitkin, yawning at the reception desk, didn't know exactly why. "His home phoned, that's all. He'll be in tomorrow."

"Maybe he went to the plant. It's right near his house."

She looked indifferent. "Yeah."

A thought struck Burckhardt. "But today is June 15th! It's quarterly tax return day—he has to sign the return!"

Miss Mitkin shrugged to indicate that that was Burckhardt's problem, not hers. She returned to her nails.

Thoroughly exasperated, Burckhardt went to his desk. It wasn't that he couldn't sign the tax returns as well as Barth, he thought resentfully. It simply wasn't his job, that was all; it was a responsibility that Barth, as office manager for Contro Chemicals' downtown office, should have taken.

HE THOUGHT briefly of calling Barth at his home or trying to reach him at the factory, but he gave up the idea quickly enough. He didn't really care much for the people at the factory and the less contact he had with them, the better. He had been to the factory once, with Barth; it had been a confusing and, in a way, a frightening experience. Barring a handful of executives and engineers, there wasn't a soul in the factory—that is, Burckhardt corrected himself, remembering what Barth had told him, not a *living* soul—just the machines.

According to Barth, each machine was controlled by a sort of computer which reproduced, in its electronic snarl, the actual memory and mind of a human being. It was an unpleasant thought. Barth, laughing, had as-

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sured him that there was no Frankenstein business of robbing graveyards and implanting brains in machines. It was only a matter, he said, of transferring a man's habit patterns from brain cells to vacuum-tube cells. It didn't hurt the man and it didn't make the machine into a monster.

But they made Burckhardt uncomfortable all the same.

He put Barth and the factory and all his other little irritations out of his mind and tackled the tax returns. It took him until noon to verify the figures—which Barth could have done out of his memory and his private ledger in ten minutes, Burckhardt resentfully reminded himself.

He sealed them in an envelope and walked out to Miss Mitkin. "Since Mr. Barth isn't here, we'd better go to lunch in shifts," he said. "You can go first."

"Thanks." Miss Mitkin languidly took her bag out of the desk drawer and began to apply makeup.

Burckhardt offered her the envelope. "Drop this in the mail for me, will you? Uh—wait a minute. I wonder if I ought to phone Mr. Barth to make sure. Did his wife say whether he was able to take phone calls?"

"Didn't say." Miss Mitkin blotted her lips carefully with a Kleenex. "Wasn't his wife, anyway. It was his daughter who called and left the message."

"The kid?" Burckhardt frowned. "I thought she was away at school."

"She called, that's all I know."

Burckhardt went back to his own office and stared distastefully at the unopened mail on his desk. He didn't like nightmares; they spoiled his whole day. He should have stayed in bed, like Barth.

A FUNNY thing happened on his way home. There was a disturbance at the corner where he usually caught his bus—someone was screaming something about a new kind of deep-freeze—so he walked an extra block. He saw the bus coming and started to trot. But behind him, someone was calling his name. He looked over his shoulder; a small harried-looking man was hurrying toward him.

Burckhardt hesitated, and then recognized him. It was a casual acquaintance named Swanson. Burckhardt sourly observed that he had already missed the bus.

He said, "Hello."

Swanson's face was desperately eager. "Burckhardt?" he asked inquiringly, with an odd intensity. And then he just stood there silently, watching Burckhardt's face, with a burning eagerness that dwindled to a faint hope and died to a regret. He was search-

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ing for something, waiting for something, Burckhardt thought. But whatever it was he wanted, Burckhardt didn't know how to supply it.

Burckhardt coughed and said again, "Hello, Swanson."

Swanson didn't even acknowledge the greeting. He merely sighed a very deep sigh.

"Nothing doing," he mumbled, apparently to himself. He nodded abstractedly to Burckhardt and turned away.

Burckhardt watched the slumped shoulders disappear in the crowd. It was an *odd* sort of day, he thought, and one he didn't much like. Things weren't going right.

Riding home on the next bus, he brooded about it. It wasn't anything terrible or disastrous; it was something out of his experience entirely. You live your life, like any man, and you form a network of impressions and reactions. You *expect* things. When you open your medicine chest, your razor is expected to be on the second shelf; when you lock your front door, you expect to have to give it a slight extra tug to make it latch.

It isn't the things that are right and perfect in your life that make it familiar. It is the things that are just a little bit wrong—the sticking latch, the light switch at the head of the stairs that needs an extra push because the spring is old and weak, the rug that unfailingly skids underfoot.

It wasn't just that things were wrong with the pattern of Burckhardt's life; it was that the *wrong* things were wrong. For instance, Barth hadn't come into the office, yet Barth *always* came in.

Burckhardt brooded about it through dinner. He b r o o d e d about it, despite his wife's attempt to interest him in a game of bridge with the neighbors, all through the evening. The neighbors were people he liked—Anne and Farley Dennerman. He had known them all their lives. But they were odd and brooding, too, this night and he barely listened to Dennerman's complaints about not being able to get good phone service or his wife's comments on the disgusting variety of television commercials they had these days.

Burckhardt was well on the way to setting an all-time record for continuous abstraction when, around midnight, with a suddenness that surprised him—he was strangely *aware* of it happening—he turned over in his bed and, quickly and completely, fell asleep.

II

ON the morning of June 15th, Burckhardt woke up screaming.

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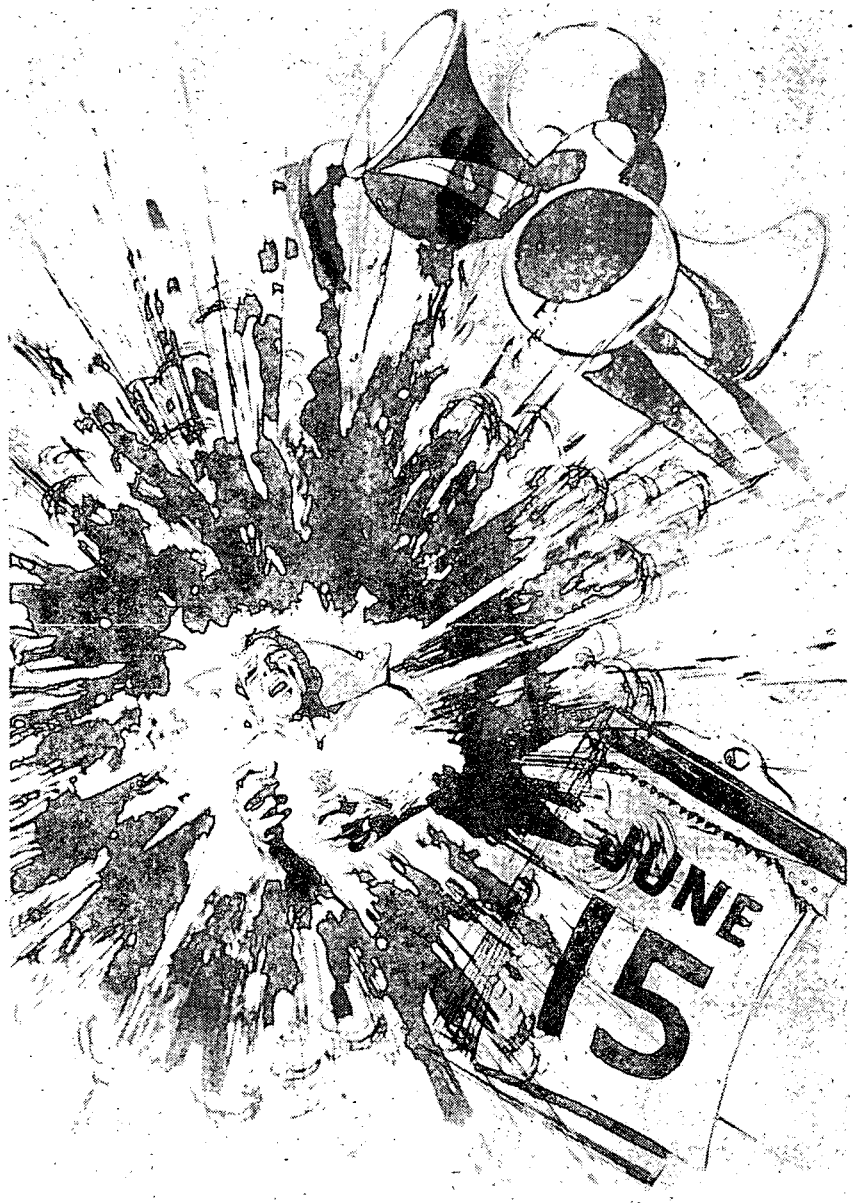

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It was more real than any dream he had ever had in his life. He could still hear the explosion, feel the blast that crushed him against a wall. It did not seem right that he should be sitting bolt upright in bed in an undisturbed room.

His wife came pattering up the stairs. "Darling!" she cried. "What's the matter?"

He mumbled, "Nothing. Bad dream."

She relaxed, hand on heart. In an angry tone, she started to say: "You gave me such a shock—"

But a noise from outside interrupted her. There was a wail of sirens and a clang of bells; it was loud and shocking.

The Burckhardts stared at each other for a heartbeat, then hurried fearfully to the window.

There were no rumbling fire engines in the street, only a small panel truck, cruising slowly along. Flaring loudspeaker horns crowned its top. From them issued the screaming sound of sirens, growing in intensity, mixed with the rumble of heavy-duty engines and the sound of bells. It was a perfect record of fire engines arriving at a four-alarm blaze.

Burckhardt said in amazement, "Mary, that's against the law! Do you know what they're doing? They're playing records of a fire. What are they up to?"

"Maybe it's a practical joke," his wife offered.

"Joke? Waking up the whole neighborhood at six o'clock in the morning?" He shook his head. "The police will be here in ten minutes," he predicted. "Wait and see."

But the police weren't—not in ten minutes, or at all. Whoever the pranksters in the car were, they apparently had a police permit for their games.

The car took a position in the middle of the block and stood silent for a few minutes. Then there was a crackle from the speaker, and a giant voice chanted:

"Feckle Freezers!
Feckle Freezers!
Gotta have a
Feckle Freezer!
Feckle, Feckle, Feckle,
Feckle, Feckle, Feckle—"

It went on and on. Every house on the block had faces staring out of windows by then. The voice was not merely loud; it was nearly deafening.

Burckhardt shouted to his wife, over the uproar, "What the hell is a Feckle Freezer?"

"Some kind of a freezer, I guess, dear," she shrieked back unhelpfully.

ABRUPTLY the noise stopped and the truck stood silent. It was still misty morning; the

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Sun's rays came horizontally across the rooftops. It was impossible to believe that, a moment ago, the silent block had been bellowing the name of a freezer.

"A crazy advertising trick," Burckhardt said bitterly. He yawned and turned away from the window. "Might as well get dressed. I guess that's the end of—"

The bellow caught him from behind; it was almost like a hard slap on the ears. A harsh, sneering voice, louder than the archangel's trumpet, howled:

"Have you got a freezer? *It stinks!* If it isn't a Feckle Freezer, *it stinks!* If it's a last year's Feckle Freezer, *it stinks!* Only this year's Feckle Freezer is any good at all! You know who owns an Ajax Freezer? Fairies own Ajax Freezers! You know who owns a Triplecold Freezer? Commies own Triplecold Freezers! Every freezer but a brand-new Feckle Freezer *stinks!*"

The voice screamed inarticulately with rage. "I'm warning you! Get out and buy a Feckle Freezer right away! Hurry up! Hurry for Feckle! Hurry for Feckle! Hurry, hurry, hurry, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle . . ."

It stopped eventually. Burckhardt licked his lips. He started to say to his wife, "Maybe we ought to call the police about—" when the speakers erupted again. It caught him off guard; it was intended to catch him off guard. It screamed:

"Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle. Cheap freezers ruin your food. You'll get sick and throw up. You'll get sick and die. Buy a Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle! Ever take a piece of meat out of the freezer you've got and see how rotten and moldy it is? Buy a Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle, Feckle. Do you want to eat rotten, stinking food? Or do you want to wise up and buy a Feckle, Feckle, Feckle—"

That did it. With fingers that kept stabbing the wrong holes, Burckhardt finally managed to dial the local police station. He got a busy signal—it was apparent that he was not the only one with the same idea—and while he was shakingly dialing again, the noise outside stopped.

He looked out the window. The truck was gone.

BURCKHARDT loosened his tie and ordered another Frosty-Flip from the waiter. If only they wouldn't keep the Crystal Cafe so *hot!* The new paint job—searing reds and blinding yellows—was bad enough, but someone seemed to have the delusion that this was January in-

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stead of June; the place was a good ten degrees warmer than outside.

He swallowed the Frosty-Flip in two gulps. It had a kind of peculiar flavor, he thought, but not bad. It certainly cooled you off, just as the waiter had promised. He reminded himself to pick up a carton of them on the way home; Mary might like them. She was always interested in something new.

He stood up awkwardly as the girl came across the restaurant toward him. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in Tylerton. Chin-height, honey-blonde hair and a figure that—well, it was all hers. There was no doubt in the world that the dress that clung to her was the only thing she wore. He felt as if he were blushing as she greeted him.

"Mr. Burckhardt." The voice was like distant tomtoms. "It's wonderful of you to let me see you, after this morning."

He cleared his throat. "Not at all. Won't you sit down, Miss—"

"April Horn," she murmured, sitting down—beside him, not where he had pointed on the other side of the table. "Call me April, won't you?"

She was wearing some kind of perfume, Burckhardt noted with what little of his mind was functioning at all. It didn't seem fair that she should be using perfume as well as everything else. He came to with a start and realized that the waiter was leaving with an order for *filets mignon* for two.

"Hey!" he objected.

"Please, Mr. Burckhardt." Her shoulder was against his, her face was turned to him, her breath was warm, her expression was tender and solicitous. "This is all on the Feckle Corporation. Please let them—it's the *least* they can do."

He felt her hand burrowing into his pocket.

"I put the price of the meal into your pocket," she whispered conspiratorially. "Please do that for me, won't you? I mean I'd appreciate it if you'd pay the waiter—I'm old-fashioned about things like that."

She smiled meltingly, then became mock-businesslike. "But you must take the money," she insisted. "Why, you're letting Feckle off lightly if you do! You could sue them for every nickel they've got, disturbing your sleep like that."

WITH a dizzy feeling, as though he had just seen someone make a rabbit disappear into a top hat, he said, "Why, it really wasn't so bad, uh, April. A little noisy, maybe, but—"

"Oh, Mr. Burckhardt!" The blue eyes were wide and admir-

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ing. "I *knew* you'd understand. It's just that—well, it's such a *wonderful* freezer that some of the outside men get carried away, so to speak. As soon as the main office found out about what happened, they sent representatives around to every house on the block to apologize. Your wife told us where we could phone you—and I'm so very pleased that you were willing to let me have lunch with you, so that I could apologize, too. Because truly, Mr. Burckhardt, it is a *fine* freezer.

"I shouldn't tell you this, but—" the blue eyes were shyly lowered—"I'd do almost anything for Feckle Freezers. It's more than a job to me." She looked up. She was enchanting. "I bet you think I'm silly, don't you?"

Burckhardt coughed. "Well, I—"

"Oh, you don't want to be unkind!" She shook her head. "No, don't pretend. You think it's silly. But really, Mr. Burckhardt, you wouldn't think so if you knew more about the Feckle. Let me show you this little booklet—"

Burckhardt got back from lunch a full hour late. It wasn't only the girl who delayed him. There had been a curious interview with a little man named Swanson, whom he barely knew, who had stopped him with desperate urgency on the street—and then left him cold.

But it didn't matter much. Mr. Barth, for the first time since Burckhardt had worked there, was out for the day—leaving Burckhardt stuck with the quarterly tax returns.

What did matter, though, was that somehow he had signed a purchase order for a twelve-cubic-foot Feckle Freezer, upright model, self-defrosting, list price $625, with a ten per cent "courtesy" discount—"Because of that *horrid* affair this morning, Mr. Burckhardt," she had said.

And he wasn't sure how he could explain it to his wife.

HE NEEDN'T have worried. As he walked in the front door, his wife said almost immediately, "I wonder if we can't afford a new freezer, dear. There was a man here to apologize about that noise and—well, we got to talking and—"

She had signed a purchase order, too.

It had been the damnedest day, Burckhardt thought later, on his way up to bed. But the day wasn't done with him yet. At the head of the stairs, the weakened spring in the electric light switch refused to click at all. He snapped it back and forth angrily and, of course, succeeded in jarring the tumbler out of its pins. The wires shorted and every light in the house went out.

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"Damn!" said Guy Burckhardt.

"Fuse?" His wife shrugged sleepily. "Let it go till the morning, dear."

Burckhardt shook his head. "You go back to bed. I'll be right along."

It wasn't so much that he cared about fixing the fuse, but he was too restless for sleep. He disconnected the bad switch with a screwdriver, stumbled down into the black kitchen, found the flashlight and climbed gingerly down the cellar stairs. He located a spare fuse, pushed an empty trunk over to the fuse box to stand on and twisted out the old fuse.

When the new one was in, he heard the starting click and steady drone of the refrigerator in the kitchen overhead.

He headed back to the steps, and stopped.

Where the old trunk had been, the cellar floor gleamed oddly bright. He inspected it in the flashlight beam. It was metal!

"Son of a gun," said Guy Burckhardt. He shook his head unbelievingly. He peered closer, rubbed the edges of the metallic patch with his thumb and acquired an annoying cut — the edges were *sharp*.

The stained cement floor of the cellar was a thin shell. He found a hammer and cracked it off in a dozen spots—everywhere was metal.

The whole cellar was a copper box. Even the cement-brick walls were false fronts over a metal sheath!

BAFFLED, he attacked one of the foundation beams. That, at least, was real wood. The glass in the cellar windows was real glass.

He sucked his bleeding thumb and tried the base of the cellar stairs. Real wood. He chipped at the bricks under the oil burner. Real bricks. The retaining walls, the floor—they were faked.

It was as though someone had shored up the house with a frame of metal and then laboriously concealed the evidence.

The biggest surprise was the upside-down boat hull that blocked the rear half of the cellar, relic of a brief home workshop period that Burckhardt had gone through a couple of years before. From above, it looked perfectly normal. Inside, though, where there should have been thwarts and seats and lockers, there was a mere tangle of braces, rough and unfinished.

"But I *built* that!" Burckhardt exclaimed, forgetting his thumb. He leaned against the hull dizzily, trying to think this thing through. For reasons beyond his comprehension, someone had

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taken his boat and his cellar away, maybe his whole house, and replaced them with a clever mock-up of the real thing.

"That's crazy," he said to the empty cellar. He stared around in the light of the flash. He whispered, "What in the name of Heaven would anybody do that for?"

Reason refused an answer; there wasn't any reasonable answer. For long minutes, Burckhardt contemplated the uncertain picture of his own sanity.

He peered under the boat again, hoping to reassure himself that it was a mistake, just his imagination. But the sloppy, unfinished bracing was unchanged. He crawled under for a better look, feeling the rough wood incredulously. Utterly impossible!

He switched off the flashlight and started to wriggle out. But he didn't make it. In the moment between the command to his legs to move and the crawling out, he felt a sudden draining weariness flooding through him.

Consciousness went—not easily, but as though it were being taken away, and Guy Burckhardt was asleep.

III

ON the morning of June 16th, Guy Burckhardt woke up in a cramped position huddled under the hull of the boat in his basement—and raced upstairs to find it was June 15th.

The first thing he had done was to make a frantic, hasty inspection of the boat hull, the faked cellar floor, the imitation stone. They were all as he had remembered them—all completely unbelievable.

The kitchen was its placid, unexciting self. The electric clock was purring soberly around the dial. Almost six o'clock, it said. His wife would be waking at any moment.

Burckhardt flung open the front door and stared out into the quiet street. The morning paper was tossed carelessly against the steps—and as he retrieved it, he noticed that this was the 15th day of June.

But that was impossible. *Yesterday* was the 15th of June. It was not a date one would forget—it was quarterly tax-return day.

He went back into the hall and picked up the telephone; he dialed for Weather Information, and got a well-modulated chant: "—and cooler, some showers. Barometric pressure thirty point zero four, rising . . . United States Weather Bureau forecast for June 15th. Warm and sunny, with high around—"

He hung the phone up. June 15th.

"Holy heaven!" Burckhardt

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said prayerfully. Things were very odd indeed. He heard the ring of his wife's alarm and bounded up the stairs.

Mary Burckhardt was sitting upright in bed with the terrified, uncomprehending stare of someone just waking out of a nightmare.

"Oh!" she gasped, as her husband came in the room. "Darling, I just had the most *terrible* dream! It was like an explosion and—"

"Again?" Burckhardt asked, not very sympathetically. "Mary, something's funny! I *knew* there was something wrong all day yesterday and—"

He went on to tell her about the copper box that was the cellar, and the odd mock-up someone had made of his boat. Mary looked astonished, then alarmed, then placatory and uneasy.

She said, "Dear, are you *sure*? Because I was cleaning that old trunk out just last week and I didn't notice anything."

"Positive!" said Guy Burckhardt. "I dragged it over to the wall to step on it to put a new fuse in after we blew the lights out and—"

"After we what?" Mary was looking more than merely alarmed.

"After we blew the lights out. You know, when the switch at the head of the stairs stuck. I went down to the cellar and—"

Mary sat up in bed. "Guy, the switch didn't stick. I turned out the lights myself last night."

Burckhardt glared at his wife. "Now I *know* you didn't! Come here and take a look!"

He stalked out to the landing and dramatically pointed to the bad switch, the one that he had unscrewed and left hanging the night before . . .

Only it wasn't. It was as it had always been. Unbelieving, Burckhardt pressed it and the lights sprang up in both halls.

MARY, looking pale and worried, left him to go down to the kitchen and start breakfast. Burckhardt stood staring at the switch for a long time. His mental processes were gone beyond the point of disbelief and shock; they simply were not functioning.

He shaved and dressed and ate his breakfast in a state of numb introspection. Mary didn't disturb him; she was apprehensive and soothing. She kissed him good-by as he hurried out to the bus without another word.

Miss Mitkin, at the reception desk, greeted him with a yawn. "Morning," she said drowsily. "Mr. Barth won't be in today."

Burckhardt started to say something, but checked himself. She would not know that Barth hadn't been in yesterday, either,

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because she was tearing a June 14th pad off her calendar to make way for the "new" June 15th sheet.

He staggered to his own desk and stared unseeingly at the morning's mail. It had not even been opened yet, but he knew that the Factory Distributors envelope contained an order for twenty thousand feet of the new acoustic tile, and the one from Finebeck & Sons was a complaint.

After a long while, he forced himself to open them. They were.

By lunchtime, driven by a desperate sense of urgency, Burckhardt made Miss Mitkin take her lunch hour first—the June-fifteenth-that-was-yesterday, *he* had gone first. She went, looking vaguely worried about his strained insistence, but it made no difference to Burckhardt's mood.

The phone rang and Burckhardt picked it up abstractedly. "Contro Chemicals Downtown, Burckhardt speaking."

The voice said, "This is Swanson," and stopped.

Burckhardt waited expectantly, but that was all. He said, "Hello?"

Again the pause. Then Swanson asked in sad resignation, "Still nothing, eh?"

"Nothing what? Swanson, is there something you want? You came up to me yesterday and went through this routine. You—"

The voice crackled: "Burckhardt! Oh, my good heavens, *you remember!* Stay right there—I'll be down in half an hour!"

"What's this all about?"

"Never mind," the little man said exultantly. "Tell you about it when I see you. Don't say any more over the phone—somebody may be listening. Just wait there. Say, hold on a minute. Will you be alone in the office?"

"Well, no. Miss Mitkin will probably—"

"Hell. Look, Burckhardt, where do you eat lunch? Is it good and noisy?"

"Why, I suppose so. The Crystal Cafe. It's just about a block—"

"I know where it is. Meet you in half an hour!" And the receiver clicked.

THE Crystal Cafe was no longer painted red, but the temperature was still up. And they had added piped-in music interspersed with commercials. The advertisements were for Frosty-Flip, Marlin Cigarettes—"They're sanitized," the announcer purred—and something called Choco-Bite candy bars that Burckhardt couldn't remember ever having heard of before. But he heard more about them quickly enough.

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While he was waiting for Swanson to show up, a girl in the cellophane skirt of a nightclub cigarette vendor came through the restaurant with a tray of tiny scarlet-wrapped candies.

"Choco-Bites are *tangy*," she was murmuring as she came close to his table. "Choco-Bites are *tangier* than tangy!"

Burckhardt, intent on watching for the strange little man who had phoned him, paid little attention. But as she scattered a handful of the confections over the table next to his, smiling at the occupants, he caught a glimpse of her and turned to stare.

"Why, Miss Horn!" he said.

The girl dropped her tray of candies.

Burckhardt rose, concerned over the girl. "Is something wrong?"

But she fled.

The manager of the restaurant was staring suspiciously at Burckhardt, who sank back in his seat and tried to look inconspicuous. He hadn't insulted the girl! Maybe she was just a very strictly reared young lady, he thought—in spite of the long bare legs under the cellophane skirt—and when he addressed her, she thought he was a masher.

Ridiculous idea. Burckhardt scowled uneasily and picked up his menu.

"Burckhardt!" It was a shrill whisper.

Burckhardt looked up over the top of his menu, startled. In the seat across from him, the little man named Swanson was sitting, tensely poised.

"Buckhardt!" the little man whispered again. "Let's get out of here! They're on to you now. If you want to stay alive, come on!"

There was no arguing with the man. Burckhardt gave the hovering manager a sick, apologetic smile and followed Swanson out. The little man seemed to know where he was going. In the street, he clutched Burckhardt by the elbow and hurried him off down the block.

"Did you see her?" he demanded. "That Horn woman, in the phone booth? She'll have them here in five minutes; believe me, so hurry it up!"

ALTHOUGH the street was full of people and cars, nobody was paying any attention to Burckhardt and Swanson. The air had a nip in it—more like October than June, Burckhardt thought, in spite of the weather bureau. And he felt like a fool, following this mad little man down the street, running away from some "them" toward—toward what? The little man might be crazy, but he was afraid. And the fear was infectious.

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"In here!" panted the little man.

It was another restaurant—more of a bar, really, and a sort of second-rate place that Burckhardt had never patronized.

"'Right straight through," Swanson whispered; and Burckhardt, like a biddable boy, sidestepped through the mass of tables to the far end of the restaurant.

It was "L"-shaped, with a front on two streets at right angles to each other. They came out on the side street, Swanson staring coldly back at the question-looking cashier, and crossed to the opposite sidewalk.

They were under the marquee of a movie theater. Swanson's expression began to relax.

"Lost them!" he crowed softly. "We're almost there."

He stepped up to the window and bought two tickets. Burckhardt trailed him in to the theater. It was a weekday matinee and the place was almost empty. From the screen came sounds of gunfire and horse's hoofs. A solitary usher, leaning against a bright brass rail, looked briefly at them and went back to staring boredly at the picture as Swanson led Burckhardt down a flight of carpeted marble steps.

They were in the lounge and it was empty. There was a door for men and one for ladies; and there was a third door, marked "MANAGER" in gold letters. Swanson listened at the door, and gently opened it and peered inside.

"Okay," he said, gesturing.

Burckhardt followed him through an empty office, to another door—a closet, probably, because it was unmarked.

But it was no closet. Swanson opened it warily, looked inside, then motioned Burckhardt to follow.

It was a tunnel, metal-walled, brightly lit. Empty, it stretched vacantly away in both directions from them.

Burckhardt looked wondering around. One thing he knew and knew full well:

No such tunnel belonged under Tylerton.

THERE was a room off the tunnel with chairs and a desk and what looked like television screens. Swanson slumped in a chair, panting.

"We're all right for a while here," he wheezed. "They don't come here much any more. If they do, we'll hear them and we can hide."

"Who?" demanded Burckhardt.

The little man said, "Martians!" His voice cracked on the word and the life seemed to go out of him. In morose tones, he went on: "Well, I think they're

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Martians. Although you could be right, you know; I've had plenty of time to think it over these last few weeks, after they got you, and it's possible they're Russians after all. Still—"

"Start from the beginning. Who got me when?"

Swanson sighed. "So we have to go through the whole thing again. All right. It was about two months ago that you banged on my door, late at night. You were all beat up—scared silly. You begged me to help you—"

"*I* did?"

"Naturally you don't remember any of this. Listen and you'll understand. You were talking a blue streak about being captured and threatened, and your wife being dead and coming back to life, and all kinds of mixed-up nonsense. I thought you were crazy. But—well, I've always had a lot of respect for you. And you begged me to hide you and I have this darkroom, you know. It locks from the inside only. I put the lock on myself. So we went in there—just to humor you—and along about midnight, which was only fifteen or twenty minutes after, we passed out."

"Passed out?"

Swanson nodded. "Both of us. It was like being hit with a sandbag. Look, didn't that happen to you again last night?"

"I guess it did," Burckhardt shook his head uncertainly.

"Sure. And then all of a sudden we were awake again, and you said you were going to show me something funny, and we went out and bought a paper. And the date on it was June 15th."

"June 15th? But that's today! I mean—"

"You got it, friend. It's *always* today!"

It took time to penetrate.

Burckhardt said wonderingly, "You've hidden out in that darkroom for how many weeks?"

"How can I tell? Four or five, maybe. I lost count. And every day the same—always the 15th of June, always my landlady, Mrs. Keefer, is sweeping the front steps, always the same headline in the papers at the corner. It gets monotonous, friend."

IV

IT was Burckhardt's idea and Swanson despised it, but he went along. He was the type who always went along.

"It's dangerous," he grumbled worriedly. "Suppose somebody comes by? They'll spot us and—"

"What have we got to lose?"

Swanson shrugged. "It's dangerous," he said again. But he went along.

Burckhardt's idea was very simple. He was sure of only one thing—the tunnel went some-

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where. Martians or Russians, fantastic plot or crazy hallucination, whatever was wrong with Tylerton had an explanation, and the place to look for it was at the end of the tunnel.

They jogged along. It was more than a mile before they began to see an end. They were in luck—at least no one came through the tunnel to spot them. But Swanson had said that it was only at certain hours that the tunnel seemed to be in use.

Always the fifteenth of June. Why? Burckhardt asked himself. Never mind the how. *Why?*

And falling asleep, completely involuntarily — everyone at the same time, it seemed. And not remembering, never remembering anything—Swanson had said how eagerly he saw Burckhardt again, the morning after Burckhardt had incautiously waited five minutes too many before retreating into the darkroom. When Swanson had come to, Burckhardt was gone. Swanson had seen him in the street that afternoon, but Burckhardt had remembered nothing.

And Swanson had lived his mouse's existence for weeks, hiding in the woodwork at night, stealing out by day to search for Burckhardt in pitiful hope, scurrying around the fringe of life, trying to keep from the deadly eyes of *them*.

Them. One of "them" was the girl named April Horn. It was by seeing her walk carelessly into a telephone booth and never come out that Swanson had found the tunnel. Another was the man at the cigar stand in Burckhardt's office building. There were more, at least a dozen that Swanson knew of or suspected.

They were easy enough to spot, once you knew where to look—for they, alone in Tylerton, changed their roles from day to day. Burckhardt was on that 8:51 bus, every morning of every day-that-was-June-15th, never different by a hair or a moment. But April Horn was sometimes gaudy in the cellophane skirt, giving away candy or cigarettes; sometimes plainly dressed; sometimes not seen by Swanson at all.

Russians? Martians? Whatever they were, what could they be hoping to gain from this mad masquerade?

Burckhardt didn't know the answer—but perhaps it lay beyond the door at the end of the tunnel. They listened carefully and heard distant sounds that could not quite be made out, but nothing that seemed dangerous. They slipped through.

And, through a wide chamber and up a flight of steps, they found they were in what Burckhardt recognized as the Contro Chemicals plant.

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NOBODY was in sight. By itself, that was not so very odd—the automatized factory had never had very many persons in it. But Burckhardt remembered, from his single visit, the endless, ceaseless busyness of the plant, the valves that opened and closed, the vats that emptied themselves and filled themselves and stirred and cooked and chemically tasted the bubbling liquids they held inside themselves. The plant was never populated, but it was never still.

Only—now it *was* still. Except for the distant sounds, there was no breath of life in it. The captive electronic minds were sending out no commands; the coils and relays were at rest.

Burckhardt said, "Come on." Swanson reluctantly followed him through the tangled aisles of stainless steel columns and tanks.

They walked as though they were in the presence of the dead. In a way, they were, for what were the automatons that once had run the factory, if not corpses? The machines were controlled by computers that were really not computers at all, but the electronic analogues of living brains. And if they were turned off, were they not dead? For each had once been a human mind.

Take a master petroleum chemist, infinitely skilled in the separation of crude oil into its fractions. Strap him down, probe into his brain with searching electronic needles. The machine scans the patterns of the mind, translates what it sees into charts and sine waves. Impress these same waves on a robot computer and you have your chemist. Or a thousand copies of your chemist, if you wish, with all of his knowledge and skill, and no human limitations at all.

Put a dozen copies of him into a plant and they will run it all, twenty-four hours a day, seven days of every week, never tiring, never overlooking anything, never forgetting . . .

Swanson stepped up closer to Burckhardt. "I'm scared," he said.

They were across the room now and the sounds were louder. They were not machine sounds, but voices; Burckhardt moved cautiously up to a door and dared to peer around it.

It was a smaller room, lined with television screens, each one—a dozen or more, at least—with a man or woman sitting before it, staring into the screen and dictating notes into a recorder. The viewers dialed from scene to scene; no two screens ever showed the same picture.

The pictures seemed to have little in common. One was a store, where a girl dressed like April Horn was demonstrating home

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freezers. One was a series of shots of kitchens. Burckhardt caught a glimpse of what looked like the cigar stand in his office building.

It was baffling and Burckhardt would have loved to stand there and puzzle it out, but it was too busy a place. There was the chance that someone would look their way or walk out and find them.

THEY found another room. This one was empty. It was an office, large and sumptuous. It had a desk, littered with papers. Burckhardt stared at them, briefly at first—then, as the words on one of them caught his attention, with incredulous fascination.

He snatched up the topmost sheet, scanned it, and another, while Swanson was frenziedly searching through the drawers.

Burckhardt swore unbelievingly and dropped the papers to the desk.

Swanson, hardly noticing, yelped with delight: "Look!" He dragged a gun from the desk. "And it's loaded, too!"

Burckhardt stared at him blankly, trying to assimilate what he had read. Then, as he realized what Swanson had said, Burckhardt's eyes sparked. "Good man!" he cried. "We'll take it. We're getting out of here with that gun, Swanson. And we're going to the police! Not the cops in Tylerton, but the F.B.I., maybe. Take a look at this!"

The sheaf he handed Swanson was headed: "Test Area Progress Report. Subject: Marlin Cigarettes Campaign." It was mostly tabulated figures that made little sense to Burckhardt and Swanson, but at the end was a summary that said:

Although Test 47-K3 pulled nearly double the number of new users of any of the other tests conducted, it probably cannot be used in the field because of local sound-truck control ordinances.

The tests in the 47-K12 group were second best and our recommendation is that retests be conducted in this appeal, testing each of the three best campaigns with and without the addition of sampling techniques.

An alternative suggestion might be to proceed directly with the top appeal in the K12 series, if the client is unwilling to go to the expense of additional tests.

All of these forecast expectations have an 80% probability of being within one-half of one per cent of results forecast, and more than 99% probability of coming within 5%.

Swanson looked up from the paper into Burckhardt's eyes. "I don't get it," he complained.

Burckhardt said, "I don't blame you. It's crazy, but it fits the facts, Swanson, *it fits the facts*. They aren't Russians and they aren't Martians. These people are advertising men! Some-

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how—heaven knows how they did it—they've taken Tylerton over. They've got us, all of us, you and me and twenty or thirty thousand other people, right under their thumbs.

"Maybe they hypnotize us and maybe it's something else; but however they do it, what happens is that they let us live a day at a time. They pour advertising into us the whole damned day long. And at the end of the day, they see what happened—and then they wash the day out of our minds and start again the next day with different advertising."

SWANSON'S jaw was hanging. He managed to close it and swallow. "Nuts!" he said flatly.

Burckhardt shook his head. "Sure, it sounds crazy—but this whole thing is crazy. How else would you explain it? You can't deny that most of Tylerton lives the same day over and over again. You've *seen* it! And that's the crazy part and we have to admit that that's true—unless *we* are the crazy ones. And once you admit that somebody, somehow, knows how to accomplish that, the rest of it makes all kinds of sense.

"Think of it, Swanson! They test every last detail before they spend a nickel on advertising! Do you have any idea what that means? Lord knows how much money is involved, but I know for a fact that some companies spend twenty or thirty million dollars a year on advertising. Multiply it, say, by a hundred companies. Say that every one of them learns how to cut its advertising cost by only ten per cent. And that's peanuts, believe me!

"If they know in advance what's going to work, they can cut their costs in half—maybe to less than half, I don't know. But that's saving two or three hundred million dollars a year—and if they pay only ten or twenty per cent of that for the use of Tylerton, it's still dirt cheap for them and a fortune for whoever took over Tylerton."

Swanson licked his lips. "You mean," he offered hesitantly, "that we're a—well, a kind of captive audience?"

Burckhardt frowned. "Not exactly." He thought for a minute. "You know how a doctor tests something like penicillin? He sets up a series of little colonies of germs on gelatine disks and he tries the stuff on one after another, changing it a little each time. Well, that's us—we're the germs, Swanson. Only it's even more efficient than that. They don't have to test more than one colony, because they can use it over and over again."

It was too hard for Swanson to take in. He only said: "What

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do we do about it?"

"We go to the police. They can't use human beings for guinea pigs!"

"How do we get to the police?"

Burckhardt hesitated. "I think —" he began slowly. "Sure. This place is the office of somebody important. We've got a gun. We'll stay right here until he comes along. And he'll get us out of here."

Simple and direct. Swanson subsided and found a place to sit, against the wall, out of sight of the door. Burckhardt took up a position behind the door itself—

And waited.

THE wait was not as long as it might have been. Half an hour, perhaps. Then Burckhardt heard approaching voices and had time for a swift whisper to Swanson before he flattened himself against the wall.

It was a man's voice, and a girl's. The man was saying, "— reason why you couldn't report on the phone? You're ruining your whole day's test! What the devil's the matter with you, Janet?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Dorchin," she said in a sweet, clear tone. "I thought it was important."

The man grumbled, "Important! One lousy unit out of twenty-one thousand."

"But it's the Burckhardt one, Mr. Dorchin. Again. And the way he got out of sight, he must have had some help."

"All right, all right. It doesn't matter, Janet; the Choco-Bite program is ahead of schedule anyhow. As long as you're this far, come on in the office and make out your worksheet. And don't worry about the Burckhardt business. He's probably just wandering around. We'll pick him up tonight and—"

They were inside the door. Burckhardt kicked it shut and pointed the gun.

"That's what you think," he said triumphantly.

It was worth the terrified hours, the bewildered sense of insanity, the confusion and fear. It was the most satisfying sensation Burckhardt had ever had in his life. The expression on the man's face was one he had read about but never actually seen: Dorchin's mouth fell open and his eyes went wide, and though he managed to make a sound that might have been a question, it was not in words.

The girl was almost as surprised. And Burckhardt, looking at her, knew why her voice had been so familiar. The girl was the one who had introduced herself to him as April Horn.

Dorchin recovered himself quickly. "Is this the one?" he asked sharply.

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The girl said, "Yes."

Dorchin nodded. "I take it back. You were right. Uh, you—Burckhardt. What do you want?"

SWANSON piped up, "Watch him! He might have another gun."

"Search him then," Burckhardt said. "I'll tell you what we want, Dorchin. We want you to come along with us to the FBI and explain to them how you can get away with kidnaping twenty thousand people."

"Kidnaping?" Dorchin snorted. "That's ridiculous, man! Put that gun away—you can't get away with this!"

Burckhardt hefted the gun grimly. "I think I can."

Dorchin looked furious and sick—but, oddly, not afraid. "Damn it—" he started to bellow, then closed his mouth and swallowed. "Listen," he said persuasively. "you're making a big mistake. I haven't kidnaped anybody, believe me!"

"I don't believe you," said Burckhardt bluntly. "Why should I?"

"But it's true! Take my word for it!"

Burckhardt shook his head. "The FBI can take your word if they like. We'll find out. Now how do we get out of here?"

Dorchin opened his mouth to argue.

Burckhardt blazed: "Don't get in my way! I'm willing to kill you if I have to. Don't you understand that? I've gone through two days of hell and every second of it I blame on you. Kill you? It would be a pleasure and I don't have a thing in the world to lose! Get us out of here!"

Dorchin's face went suddenly opaque. He seemed about to move; but the blonde girl he had called Janet slipped between him and the gun.

"Please!" she begged Burckhardt. "You don't understand. You mustn't shoot!"

"Get out of my way!"

"But, Mr. Burckhardt—"

She never finished. Dorchin, his face unreadable, headed for the door. Burckhardt had been pushed one degree too far. He swung the gun, bellowing. The girl called out sharply. He pulled the trigger. Closing on him with pity and pleading in her eyes, she came again between the gun and the man.

Burckhardt aimed low instinctively, to cripple, not to kill. But his aim was not good.

The pistol bullet caught her in the pit of the stomach.

DORCHIN was out and away, the door slamming behind him, his footsteps racing into the distance.

Burckhardt hurled the gun

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across the room and jumped to the girl.

Swanson was moaning, "That finishes us, Burckhardt. Oh, why did you do it? We could have got away. We could have gone to the police. We were practically out of here! We—"

Burckhardt wasn't listening. He was kneeling beside the girl. She lay flat on her back, arms helter-skelter. There was no blood, hardly any sign of the wound; but the position in which she lay was one that no living human being could have held.

Yet she wasn't dead.

She wasn't dead—and Burckhardt, frozen beside her, thought: *She isn't alive, either.*

There was no pulse, but there was a rhythmic ticking of the outstretched fingers of one hand.

There was no sound of breathing, but there was a hissing, sizzling noise.

The eyes were open and they were looking at Burckhardt. There was neither fear nor pain in them, only a pity deeper than the Pit.

She said, through lips that writhed erratically, "Don't—worry, Mr. Burckhardt. I'm—all right."

Burckhardt rocked back on his haunches, staring. Where there should have been blood, there was a clean break of a substance that was not flesh; and a curl of thin golden-copper wire.

Burckhardt moistened his lips. "You're a robot," he said.

The girl tried to nod. The twitching lips said, "I am. And so are you."

V

SWANSON, after a single inarticulate sound, walked over to the desk and sat staring at the wall. Burckhardt rocked back and forth beside the shattered puppet on the floor. He had no words.

The girl managed to say, "I'm—sorry all this happened." The lovely lips twisted into a rictus sneer, frightening on that smooth young face, until she got them under control. "Sorry," she said again. "The—nerve center was right about where the bullet hit. Makes it difficult to—control this body."

Burckhardt nodded automatically, accepting the apology. Robots. It was obvious, now that he knew it. In hindsight, it was inevitable. He thought of his mystic notions of hypnosis or Martians or something stranger still—idiotic, for the simple fact of created robots fitted the facts better and more economically.

All the evidence had been before him. The automatized factory, with its transplanted minds—why not transplant a mind into a humanoid robot, give it its

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original owner's features and form?

Could it know that it was a robot?

"All of us," Burckhardt said, hardly aware that he spoke out loud. "My wife and my secretary and you and the neighbors. All of us the same."

"No." The voice was stronger. "Not exactly the same, all of us. I chose it, you see. I—" this time the convulsed lips were not a random contortion of the nerves —"I was an ugly woman, Mr. Burckhardt, and nearly sixty years old. Life had passed me. And when Mr. Dorchin offered me the chance to live again as a beautiful girl, I jumped at the opportunity. Believe me, I *jumped,* in spite of its disadvantages. My flesh body is still alive—it is sleeping, while I am here. I could go back to it. But I never do."

"And the rest of us?"

"Different, Mr. Burckhardt. I work here. I'm carrying out Mr. Dorchin's orders, mapping the results of the advertising tests, watching you and the others live as he makes you live. I do it by choice, but you have no choice. Because, you see, you are dead."

"Dead?" cried Burckhardt; it was almost a scream.

The blue eyes looked at him unwinkingly and he knew that it was no lie. He swallowed, marveling at the intricate mechanisms that let him swallow, and sweat, and eat.

He said: "Oh. The explosion in my dream."

"It was no dream. You are right—the explosion. That was real and this plant was the cause of it. The storage tanks let go and what the blast didn't get, the fumes killed a little later. But almost everyone died in the blast, twenty-one thousand persons. You died with them and that was Dorchin's chance."

"The damned ghoul!" said Burckhardt.

THE twisted shoulders shrugged with an odd grace. "Why? You were gone. And you and all the others were what Dorchin wanted—a whole town, a perfect slice of America. It's as easy to transfer a pattern from a dead brain as a living one. Easier—the dead can't say no. Oh, it took work and money—the town was a wreck—but it was possible to rebuild it entirely, especially because it wasn't necessary to have all the details exact.

"There were the homes where even the brains had been utterly destroyed, and those are empty inside, and the cellars that needn't be too perfect, and the streets that hardly matter. And anyway, it only has to last for one day. The same day—June 15th—over and

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over again; and if someone finds something a little wrong, somehow, the discovery won't have time to snowball, wreck the validity of the tests, because all errors are canceled out at midnight."

The face tried to smile. "That's the dream, Mr. Burckhardt, that day of June 15th, because you never really lived it. It's a present from Mr. Dorchin, a dream that he gives you and then takes back at the end of the day, when he has all his figures on how many of you responded to what variation of which appeal, and the maintenance crews go down the tunnel to go through the whole city, washing out the new dream with their little electronic drains, and then the dream starts all over again. On June 15th.

"Always June 15th, because June 14th is the last day any of you can remember alive. Sometimes the crews miss someone—as they missed you, because you were under your boat. But it doesn't matter. The ones who are missed give themselves away if they show it—and if they don't, it doesn't affect the test. But they don't drain us, the ones of us who work for Dorchin. We sleep when the power is turned off, just as you do. When we wake up, though, we remember." The face contorted wildly. "If I could only forget!"

Burckhardt said unbelievingly, "All this to sell merchandise! It must have cost millions!"

The robot called April Horn said, "It did. But it has made millions for Dorchin, too. And that's not the end of it. Once he finds the master words that make people act, do you suppose he will stop with that? Do you suppose—"

The door opened, interrupting her. Burckhardt whirled. Belatedly remembering Dorchin's flight, he raised the gun.

"Don't shoot," ordered the voice calmly. It was not Dorchin; it was another robot, this one not disguised with the clever plastics and cosmetics, but shining plain. It said metallically: "Forget it, Burckhardt. You're not accomplishing anything. Give me that gun before you do any more damage. Give it to me *now*."

BURCKHARDT bellowed angrily. The gleam on this robot torso was steel; Burckhardt was not at all sure that his bullets would pierce it, or do much harm if they did. He would have put it to the test—

But from behind him came a whimpering, scurrying whirlwind; its name was Swanson, hysterical with fear. He catapulted into Burckhardt and sent him sprawling, the gun flying free.

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"Please!" begged Swanson incoherently, prostrate before the steel robot. "He would have shot you—please don't hurt me! Let me work for you, like that girl. I'll do anything, anything you tell me—"

The robot voice said. "We don't need your help." It took two precise steps and stood over the gun—and spurned it, left it lying on the floor.

The wrecked blonde robot said, without emotion, "I doubt that I can hold out much longer, Mr. Dorchin."

"Disconnect if you have to," replied the steel robot.

Burckhardt blinked. "But you're not Dorchin!"

The steel robot turned deep eyes on him. "I am," it said. "Not in the flesh—but this is the body I am using at the moment. I doubt that you can damage this one with the gun. The other robot body was more vulnerable. Now will you stop this nonsense? I don't want to have to damage you; you're too expensive for that. Will you just sit down and let the maintenance crews adjust you?"

Swanson groveled. "You—you won't punish us?"

The steel robot had no expression, but its voice was almost surprised. "Punish you?" it repeated on a rising note. "How?"

Swanson quivered as though the word had been a whip; but Burckhardt flared: "Adjust *him*, if he'll let you—but not me! You're going to have to do me a lot of damage, Dorchin. I don't care what I cost or how much trouble it's going to be to put me back together again. But I'm going out of that door! If you want to stop me, you'll have to kill me. You won't stop me any other way!"

The steel robot took a half-step toward him, and Burckhardt involuntarily checked his stride. He stood poised and shaking, ready for death, ready for attack, ready for anything that might happen.

Ready for anything except what did happen. For Dorchin's steel body merely stepped aside, between Burckhardt and the gun, but leaving the door free.

"Go ahead," invited the steel robot. "Nobody's stopping you."

OUTSIDE the door, Burckhardt brought up sharp. It was insane of Dorchin to let him go! Robot or flesh, victim or beneficiary, there was nothing to stop him from going to the FBI or whatever law he could find away from Dorchin's synthetic empire, and telling his story. Surely the corporations who paid Dorchin for test results had no notion of the ghoul's technique he used; Dorchin would have to keep it

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from them, for the breath of publicity would put a stop to it. Walking out meant death, perhaps—but at that moment in his pseudo-life, death was no terror for Burckhardt.

There was no one in the corridor. He found a window and stared out of it. There was Tylerton—an ersatz city, but looking so real and familiar that Burckhardt almost imagined the whole episode a dream. It was no dream, though. He was certain of that in his heart and equally certain that nothing in Tylerton could help him now.

It had to be the other direction.

It took him a quarter of an hour to find a way, but he found it—skulking through the corridors, dodging the suspicion of footsteps, knowing for certain that his hiding was in vain, for Dorchin was undoubtedly aware of every move he made. But no one stopped him, and he found another door.

It was a simple enough door from the inside. But when he opened it and stepped out, it was like nothing he had ever seen.

First there was light—brilliant, incredible, blinding light. Burckhardt blinked upward, unbelieving and afraid.

He was standing on a ledge of smooth, finished metal. Not a dozen yards from his feet, the ledge dropped sharply away; he hardly dared approached the brink, but even from where he stood he could see no bottom to the chasm before him. And the gulf extended out of sight into the glare on either side of him.

NO wonder Dorchin could so easily give him his freedom! From the factory, there was nowhere to go—but how incredible this fantastic gulf, how impossible the hundred white and blinding suns that hung above!

A voice by his side said inquiringly, "Burckhardt?" And thunder rolled the name, mutteringly soft, back and forth in the abyss before him.

Burckhardt wet his lips. "Y-yes?" he croaked.

"This is Dorchin. Not a robot this time, but Dorchin in the flesh, talking to you on a hand mike. Now you have seen, Burckhardt. Now will you be reasonable and let the maintenance crews take over?"

Burckhardt stood paralyzed. One of the moving mountains in the blinding glare came toward him.

It towered hundreds of feet over his head; he stared up at its top, squinting helplessly into the light.

It looked like—

Impossible!

The voice in the loudspeaker at the door said, "Burckhardt?"

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But he was unable to answer.

A heavy rumbling sigh. "I see," said the voice. "You finally understand. There's no place to go. You know it now. I could have told you, but you might not have believed me, so it was better for you to see it yourself. And after all, Burckhardt, why would I reconstruct a city just the way it was before? I'm a businessman; I count costs. If a thing has to be full-scale, I build it that way. But there wasn't any need to in this case."

From the mountain before him, Burckhardt helplessly saw a lesser cliff descend carefully toward him. It was long and dark, and at the end of it was whiteness, five-fingered whiteness . . .

"Poor little Burckhardt," crooned the loudspeaker, while the echoes rumbled through the enormous chasm that was only a workshop. "It must have been quite a shock for you to find out you were living in a town built on a table top."

VI

IT was the morning of June 15th, and Guy Burckhardt woke up screaming out of a dream.

It had been a monstrous and incomprehensible dream, of explosions and shadowy figures that were not men and terror beyond words.

He shuddered and opened his eyes.

Outside his bedroom window, a hugely amplified voice was howling.

Burckhardt stumbled over to the window and stared outside. There was an out-of-season chill to the air, more like October than June; but the scene was normal enough —except for the sound-truck that squatted at curbside halfway down the block. Its speaker horns blared:

"Are you a coward? Are you a fool? Are you going to let crooked politicians steal the country from you? NO! Are you going to put up with four more years of graft and crime? NO! Are you going to vote straight Federal Party all up and down the ballot? YES! *You just bet you are!*"

Sometimes he screams, sometimes he wheedles, threatens, begs, cajoles . . . but his voice goes on and on through one June 15th after another.

—FREDERIK POHL

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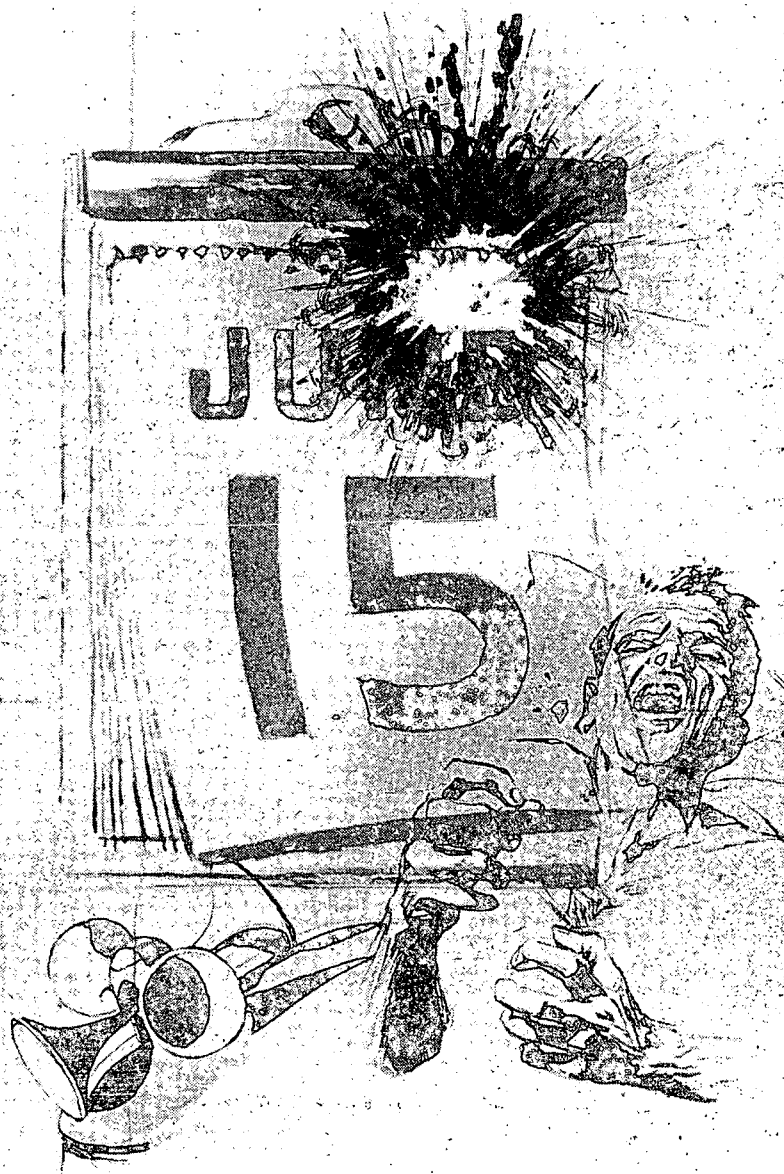

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The Vilbar Party

"Nuts to you!" was what Narli knew Earthmen would tell him . . . only it was frismil nuts!

By EVELYN E. SMITH

Illustrated by KOSSIN

"THE Perzils are giving a vilbar party tomorrow night," Professor Slood said cajolingly. "You *will* come this time, won't you, Narli?"

Narli Gzann rubbed his forehead fretfully. "You know how I feel about parties, Karn." He took a frismil nut out of the tray on his desk and nibbled it in annoyance.

"But this is in your honor, Narli—a farewell party. You must go. It would be—it would be unthinkable if you didn't." Karn Slood's eyes were pleading. He could not possibly be held responsible for his friend's antisocial behavior and yet, Narli knew, he would somehow feel at fault.

Narli sighed. He supposed he would have to conform to public sentiment in this particular instance, but he was damned if he would give in gracefully. "After all, what's so special about the occasion? I'm just leaving to take another teaching job, that's all." He took another nut.

"That's *all!*" Slood's face swelled with emotion. "You can't really be that indifferent."

"Another job, that's all it is to

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me," Narli persisted. "At an exceptionally high salary, of course, or I wouldn't dream of accepting a position so inconveniently located."

Slood was baffled and hurt and outraged. "You have been honored by being the first of our people to be offered an exchange professorship on another planet," he said stiffly, "and you call it 'just another job.' Why, I would have given my right antenna to get it!"

Narli realized that he had again overstepped the invisible boundary between candor and tactlessness. He poked at the nuts with a stylus.

"Honored by being the first of our species to be offered a guinea-pigship," he murmured.

He had not considered this aspect of the matter before, but now that it occurred to him, he was probably right.

"Oh, I don't mind, really." He waved away the other's sudden commiseration. "You know I like being alone most of the time, so I won't find that uncomfortable. Students are students, whether they're Terrestrials or Saturnians. I suppose they'll laugh at me behind my back, but then even here, my students always did that."

He gave a hollow laugh and unobtrusively put out one of his hands for a nut. "At least on Earth I'll know why they're laughing."

THERE was pain on Slood's expressive face as he firmly removed the nut tray from his friend's reach. "I didn't think of it from that angle, Narli. Of course you're right. Human beings, from what I've read of them, are not noted for tolerance. It will be difficult, but I'm sure you'll be able to—" he choked on the kindly lie—"win them over."

Narli repressed a bitter laugh. Anyone less likely than he to win over a hostile alien species through sheer personal charm could hardly be found on Saturn. Narli Gzann had been chosen as first exchange professor between Saturn and Earth because of his academic reputation, not his personality. But although the choosers had probably not had that aspect of the matter in mind, the choice, he thought, was a wise one.

As an individual of solitary habits, he was not apt to be much lonelier on one planet than another.

And he had accepted the post largely because he felt that, as an alien being, he would be left strictly alone. This would give him the chance to put in a lot of work on his definitive history of the Solar System, a monumental project from which he begrudged

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all the time he had to spend in fulfilling even the minimum obligations expected of a professor on sociable Saturn.

The salary was a weighty factor, too—not only was it more than twice what he had been getting, but since there would be no necessity for spending more than enough for bare subsistence he would be able to save up a considerable amount and retire while still comparatively young. It was pleasant to imagine a scholarly life unafflicted by students.

He could put up with a good deal for that goal.

But how could he alleviate the distress he saw on Karn's face? He did not consciously want to hurt the only person who, for some strange reason, seemed to be fond of him, so he said the only thing he could think of to please: "All right, Karn, I'll go to the Perzils tomorrow night."

It would be a deadly bore—parties always were—and he would eat too much, but, after all, the thought that it would be a long time before he'd ever see any of his own kind again would make the affair almost endurable. And just this once it would be all right for him to eat as much as he wanted. When he was on Earth out of reach of decent food, he would probably trim down considerably.

"I JUST *know* you're going to love Earth, Professor Gzann," the hostess on the interplanetary liner gushed.

"I'm sure I shall," he lied politely. She smiled at him too much, over-doing her professional cordiality; underneath the effusiveness, he sensed the repulsion. Of course he couldn't blame her for trying not to show her distaste for the strange creature—the effort at concealment was, as a matter of fact, more than he had expected from a Terrestrial. But he wished she would leave him alone to meditate. He had planned to get a lot of meditation done on the journey.

"You speak awfully good English," she told him.

He looked at her. "I am said to have some scholarly aptitude. I understand that's why I was chosen as an exchange professor. It does seem reasonable, doesn't it?"

She turned pink—a sign of embarrassment with these creatures, he had learned. "I didn't mean to—to question your ability, Professor. It's just that—well, you don't look like a professor."

"Indeed?" he said frostily. "And what do I look like, then?"

She turned even rosier. "Oh—I—I don't know exactly. It's just that—well . . ." And she fled.

He couldn't resist flicking his antennae forward to catch her

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sotto voce conversation with the co-pilot; it was so seldom you got the chance to learn what others were saying about you behind your back. "But I could hardly tell him he looks like a teddy bear, could I?"

"He probably doesn't even know what a teddy bear is."

"Perhaps I don't," Narli thought resentfully, "but I can guess."

With low cunning, the Terrestrials seemed to have ferreted out the identity of all his favorite dishes and kept serving them to him incessantly. By the time the ship made planetfall on Earth, he had gained ten grisbuts.

"Oh, well," he thought, "I suppose it's all just part of the regular diplomatic service. On Earth, I'll have to eat crude native foods, so I'll lose all the weight again."

President Purrington of North America came himself to meet Narli at the airfield because Narli was the first interplanetary exchange professor in history.

"Welcome to our planet, Professor Gzann," he said with warm diplomatic cordiality, wringing Narli's upper right hand after a moment of indecision. "We shall do everything in our power to make your stay here a happy and memorable one."

"I wish you would begin by doing something about the climate," Narli thought. It was stupid of him not to have realized how hot it would be on Earth. He was really going to suffer in this torrid climate; especially in the tight Terrestrial costume he wore over his fur for the sake of conformity. Of course, justice compelled him to admit to himself, the clothes wouldn't have become so snug if he hadn't eaten quite so much on board ship.

Purrington indicated the female beside him. "May I introduce my wife?"

"Ohhh," the female gasped, "isn't he *cute!*"

THE President and Narli stared at her in consternation. She looked abashed for a moment, then smiled widely at Narli and the press photographers.

"Welcome to Earth, dear Professor Gzann!" she exclaimed, mispronouncing his name, of course. Bending down, she kissed him right upon his fuzzy forehead.

Kissing was not a Saturnian practice, nor did Narni approve of it; however, he had read enough about Earth to know that Europeans sometimes greeted dignitaries in this peculiar way. Only this place, he had been given to understand, was not Europe but America.

"I am having a cocktail party in your honor this afternoon!"

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she beamed, smoothing her flowered print dress down over her girdle. "You'll be there at five sharp, won't you, dear?"

"Delighted," he promised dismally. He could hardly plead a previous engagement a moment after arriving.

"I've tried to get all the things you like to eat," she went on anxiously, "but you will tell me if there's anything special, won't you?"

"I am on a diet," he said. He must be strong. Probably the food would be repulsive anyhow, so he'd have no difficulty controlling his appetite. "Digestive disorders, you know. A glass of Vichy and a biscuit will be . . ."

He stopped, for there were tears in Mrs. Purrington's eyes. "Your tummy hurts? Oh, you poor little darling!"

"Gladys!" the President said sharply.

There were frismil nuts at Mrs. Purrington's cocktail party and vilbar and even slipnis broogs . . . all imported at fabulous expense, Narli knew, but then this was a government affair and expense means nothing to a government since, as far as it is concerned, money grows on taxpayers. Some of the native foods proved surprisingly palatable, too—pâté de foie gras and champagne and little puff pastries full of delightful surprises. Narli was afraid he was making a zloogle of himself. However, he thought, trying not to catch sight of his own portly person in the mirrors that walled the room, the lean days were just ahead.

Besides, what could he do when everyone insisted on pressing food on him? "Try this, Professor Gzann." "Do try that, Professor Gzann." ("Doesn't he look cunning in his little dress suit?") They crowded around him. The women cooed, the men beamed, and Narli ate. He would be glad when he could detach himself from all this cloying diplomacy and get back to the healthy rancor of the classroom.

AT school, the odor of chalk dust, ink and rotting apple cores was enough like its Saturnian equivalent to make Narli feel at home immediately. The students would dislike him on sight, he knew. It is in the nature of the young to be hostile toward whatever is strange and alien. They would despise him and jeer at him, and he, in his turn, would give them long, involved homework assignments and such difficult examinations that they would fail . . .

Narli waddled briskly up to his desk which had, he saw, been scaled down to Saturnian size, whereas he had envisioned himself struggling triumphantly with

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ordinary Earth-sized furniture. But the atmosphere was as hot and sticky and intolerable as he had expected. Panting as unobtrusively as possible, he rapped with his pointer. "Attention, students!"

Now should come the derisive babble . . . but there was a respectful silence, broken suddenly by a shrill feminine whisper of, "Oooo, he's so adorable!" followed by the harsh, "Shhh, Ava! You'll embarrass the poor little thing."

Narli's face swelled. "I am your new professor of Saturnian Studies. Saturn, as you probably know, is a major planet. It is much larger and more important than Earth, which is only a minor planet."

The students obediently took this down in their notebooks. They carefully took down everything he said. Even a bout of coughing that afflicted him halfway through seemed to be getting a phonetic transcription. From time to time, they would interrupt his lecture with questions so pertinent, so well-thought out and so courteous that all he could do was answer them.

His antennae lifted to catch the whispers that from time to time were exchanged between even the best-behaved of the students. "Isn't he precious?" "Seems like a nice fellow—sound grasp of his subject." "Sweet little thing!" "Unusually interesting presentation." "Doesn't he remind you of Winnie the Pooh?" "Able chap." "Just darling!"

After class, instead of rushing out of the room, they hovered around his desk with intelligent, solicitous questions. Did he like Earth? Was his desk too high? Too low? Didn't he find it hot with all that fur? Such lovely, soft, fluffy fur, though. "Do you mind if I stroke one of your paws —*hands*—Professor?" ("So cuddly-looking!")

He said yes, as a matter of fact, he was hot, and no, he didn't mind being touched in a spirit of scientific investigation.

He had a moment of uplift at the teachers' cafeteria when he discovered lunch to be virtually inedible. The manager, however, had been distressed to see him pick at his food, and by dinnertime a distinguished chef with an expert knowledge of Saturnian cuisine had been rushed from Washington. Since the school food was inedible for all intelligent life-forms, everyone ate the Saturnian dishes and praised Narli as a public benefactor.

THAT night, alone in the quiet confines of his small room at the Men's Faculty Club, Narli had spread out his notes and was about to start work on his his-

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tory when there was a knock at the door. He trotted over to open it, grumbling to himself.

The head of his department smiled brightly down at him. "Some of us are going out for a couple of drinks and a gabfest. Care to come along?"

Narli did not see how he could refuse and still carry the Saturnian's burden, so he accepted. Discovering that gin fizzes and Alexanders were even more palatable than champagne and more potent than vilbar, he told several Saturnine locker-room stories which were hailed with loud merriment. But he was being laughed *at,* not *with,* he knew. All this false cordiality, he assured himself, would die down after a couple of days, and then he would be able to get back to work. He must curb his intellectual impatience.

In the morning, he found that enrollment in his classes had doubled, and the room was crowded to capacity with the bright, shining, eager faces of young Terrestrials athirst for learning. There were apples, chocolates and imported frismil nuts on his desk, as well as a pressing invitation from Mrs. Purrington for him to spend all his weekends and holidays at the White House. The window was fitted with an air-conditioning unit which, he later discovered, his classes had chipped in to buy for him, and the temperature had been lowered to a point where it was almost comfortable. All the students wore coats.

When he went out on the campus, women—students, teachers, even strangers—stopped to talk to him, to exclaim over him, to touch him, even to kiss him. Photographers were perpetually taking pictures, some of which turned up in the Student Union as full-color postcards. They sold like Lajī out of season.

Narli wrote in Saturnian on the back of one: "Having miserable time; be glad you're not here," and sent it to Slood.

There were cocktail parties, musicales and balls in Narli's honor. When he tried to refuse an invitation, he was accused of shyness and virtually dragged to the affair by laughing members of the faculty. He put on so much weight that he had to buy a complete new Terrestrial outfit, which set him back a pretty penny. As a result, he had to augment his income by lecturing to women's clubs. They slobbered appallingly.

NARLI'S students did all their homework assiduously and, in fact, put in more work than had been assigned. At the end of the year, not only did all of them pass, but with flying colors.

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"I hope you'll remember, Professor Gzann," the President of the University said, "that there will always be a job waiting for you here—a non-exchange professorship. Love to have you."

"Thank you," Narli replied politely.

Mrs. Purrington broke into loud sobs when he told her he was leaving Earth. "Oh, I'll miss you so, Narli! You will write, won't you?"

"Yes, of course," he said grimly. That made two hundred and eighteen people to whom he'd had to promise to write.

It was fortunate he was traveling as a guest of the North American government, he thought as he supervised the loading of his matched interplanetary luggage; his eight steamer baskets; his leather-bound *Encyclopedia Terrestria,* with his name imprinted in gold on each volume; his Indian war-bonnet; his oil painting of the President; and his six cases of champagne—all parting gifts —onto the liner. Otherwise the fee for excess luggage would take what little remained of his bank account. There had been so many expenses — clothes and hostess gifts and ice.

Not all his mementoes were in his luggage. A new rare-metal watch gleamed on each of his four furry wrists; a brand-new trobskin wallet, platinum keychain, and uranium fountain pen were in his pocket; and a diamond and curium bauble clasped a tie lovingly handpainted by a female student. The argyles on his fuzzy ankles had been knitted by another. Still another devoted pupil had presented him with a hand-woven plastic case full of frismil nuts to eat on the way back.

"WELL, Narli!" Slood said, his face swelling with joy. "Well, well! You've put on weight, I see."

Narli dropped into his old chair with a sigh. Surely Slood might have picked something else to comment on first—his haggardness, for instance, or the increased spirituality of his expression.

"Nothing else to do on Earth in your leisure moments but eat, I suppose," Slood said, pushing over the nut tray. "Even their food. Have some frismils."

"No, thank you," Narli replied coldly.

Slood looked at him in distress. "Oh, how you must have suffered! Was it very, very bad, Narli?"

Narli hunched low in his chair. "It was just awful."

"I'm sure they didn't mean to be unkind," Slood assured him. "Naturally, you were a strange creature to them and they're only—"

"*Unkind?*" Narli gave a bitter

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laugh. "They practically killed me with kindness! It was fuss, fuss, fuss all the time."

"Now, Narli, I do wish you wouldn't be quite so sarcastic."

"I'm *not* being sarcastic. And I wasn't a strange creature to them. It seems there's a sort of popular child's toy on Earth known as a—" he winced—"teddy bear. I aroused pleasant childhood memories in them, so they showered me with affection and edibles."

Slood closed his eyes in anguish. "You are very brave, Narli," he said almost reverently. "Very brave and wise and good. Certainly that would be the best thing to tell our people. After all, the Terrestrials are our allies; we don't want to stir up public sentiment against them. But you can be honest with *me,* Narli. Did they refuse to serve you in restaurants? Were you segregated in public vehicles? Did they shrink from you when you came close?"

Narli beat the desk with all four hands. "I was hardly ever given the chance to be alone! They crawled all over me! Restaurants begged for my trade! I had to hire private vehicles because in public ones I was mobbed by admirers!"

"Such a short time," Slood murmured, "and already suspicious of even me, your oldest friend. But don't talk about it if you don't want to, Narli . . . Tell me, though, did they sneer at you and whisper half-audible insults? Did they—"

"You're right!" Narli snapped. "I *don't* want to talk about it."

Slood placed a comforting hand upon his shoulder. "Perhaps that's wisest, until the shock of your experience has worn off."

Narli made an irritable noise.

"The Perzils are giving a vilbar party tonight," Slood said. "But I know how you feel about parties. I've told them you're exhausted from your trip and won't be able to make it."

"Oh, you did, did you?" Narli asked ironically. "What makes you think you know how I feel about parties?"

"But—"

"There's an interesting saying on Earth: 'Travel is so broadening.'" He looked down at his bulges with tolerant amusement. "In more than one way, in case the meaning eludes you. Very sound psychologically. I've discovered that I *like* parties. I *like* being *liked.* If you'll excuse me, I'm going to inform the Perzils that I shall be delighted to come to their party. Care to join me?"

"Well," Slood mumbled, "I'd like to, but I have so much work—"

"Introvert!" said Narli, and he began dialing the Perzils.

—EVELYN E. SMITH

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PERFECT CONTROL

By RICHARD STOCKHAM

Why can't you go home again after years in space? There had to be an answer . . . could he find it in time, though?

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Illustrated by MEL HUNTER

SITTING at his desk, Colonel Halter brought the images on the telescreen into focus. Four booster tugs were fastening, like sky-barnacles, onto the hull of the ancient derelict, *Alpha*.

He watched as they swung her around, stern down, and sank with her through the blackness, toward the bluish-white, moonlighted arc of Earth a thousand miles below.

He pressed a button. The image of tugs and hull faded and the control room of the old ship swam onto the screen.

Colonel Halter saw the crew, sitting in a half circle, before the control panel.

The telescreen in the control room of old *Alpha* was yet dark. The faces watching it held no care lines or laugh lines, only a vague expression of kindness. They could be faces of wax or those of people dying pleasantly.

Colonel Halter shook his head. Brilliant—the finest space people in the field seventy-five years

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back—and now he was to get them to come out of that old hull. God almighty, how could you pull people out of an environment they were perfectly adjusted to? Logic? Force? Reason? Humoring? How could you know?

Talk to them, he told himself. He dreaded it, but the problem had to be faced.

He flipped a switch on his desk; saw light jump into their screen and his own face take shape there; saw their faces on his own screen, set now, like the faces of stone idols.

He turned another dial. The picture swung around so that he was looking into their eyes and they into his.

Halter said, "Captain McClelland?"

One of the old men nodded. "Yes."

McClelland was clean-shaven. His uniform, treated against deterioration, was immaculate, but his body showed frail and bony through it. His face was long and hollow-cheeked, the eyes deep-set and bright. The head was like a skull, the nose an eagle's beak.

"I'm Colonel Halter. I'm a psychotherapist."

NONE of them answered. There was only the faint thrumming of the rockets lowering the old ship to Earth.

"Let me be sure I have your identities right," went on Colonel Halter.

He then looked at the man on the captain's right. "You, I believe, are Lieutenant James Brady."

Brady nodded, his pale, eroded face expressionless.

Colonel Halter saw the neat black uniform, identical with the captain's; saw the cropped gray hair and meticulously trimmed goatee.

"And you," he said to the woman sitting beside the lieutenant, "are Dr. Anna Mueller."

The same nod and thin, expressionless face. The same paleness. Faded hazel eyes; hair white and trimmed close to her head; body emaciated.

"Daniel Carlyle, astrogator."

The nod.

Like the doctor's brother, thought Colonel Halter, and yet like the lieutenant with his cropped hair and with an identical goatee.

"Caroline Gordon, dietician and televisor. John Crowley, rocketman."

Each nodded, expressionless, their faces like white, weathered statues in a desert.

Colonel Halter turned to the captain. The rocket thrum of the tugs had become a roar as the gravity pulled against the antique hull.

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"We understand," said Colonel Halter, "that you demand repairs for your ship and fuel enough to take you back into deep space."

"That is right." The voice was low, slightly harsh.

"You're all close to a hundred years old. You'd die out there. Here, with medical aid, you'd easily live to a hundred and twenty-five."

Dr. Anna Mueller's head moved slightly. "We're aware of that, Colonel."

"It'd be pointless," said the colonel, "and a shameful waste. You're still the only crew that ever made it out beyond the Solar System. You've kept records of your personal experience, how you survived. They're valuable."

Dr. Mueller caught her breath. "Our adjustment to space is our private concern. I don't think you could understand."

"Maybe not, but we could try. To us, of course, complete adjustment is a living death."

"To us, it was a matter of staying alive."

Halter turned aside from disagreement, searching for common ground. "You'd be protected here, you know. You deserve that."

"Who'd protect us from you?" asked the captain. "Life in the Solar System is destructive."

BRADY, the lieutenant, leaned forward. "You've failed— all through the whole System."

"We haven't finished living in it," said Halter. "Who can pin a label on us of success or failure?"

Miss Gordon, dietician and televisor, said quietly, "There are some records I'd like to show you. We compiled them while the *Alpha* was drifting back into the System."

Halter watched the frail arm reach out and turn a dial.

A point of light grew on the screen in Colonel Halter's office.

"Pluto," said her quiet voice.

Halter watched the lightspot focus on a mountain of ice. Men in suits of steel were crawling up its frozen side. Other men on the mountain's top were sighting guns. The men below were sighting guns. Yellow fire spurted from the top and the sides of the mountain, blending into a lake of fire. There was a great hissing and a rushing torrent of boiling water and rolling, twisting steel-clad bodies. The mountain of ice melted like a lump of lard in a hot frying pan. Only the steel bodies glinted, motionless, in the pale wash of sunlight.

Halter watched the brightness die and another lightspot grow one moon. The focus shifted in close to a fleet of shining silver ships.

Then another fleet dropped

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from close above, hanging still, and there were blinding flashes engulfing each ship below, one after the other, until there were only the shining ships above, climbing into the dusk glow of the Sun.

The glowing circle of bright-ringed Saturn was already rushing toward Colonel Halter from far back in the depth of screen. The focus shifted onto the planet's glaring surface. Men in the uniform of Earth soldiers were rushing out of transparent shell houses and staring in panic as the missiles plummeted through the shells and erupted clouds of steam which spouted up from mile-deep craters and there was nothing but the steam and the holes and the white cold.

Jupiter made a hole in the blackness, with eleven tiny holes scattered all around her, like droplets of fire. Ships streaked up, one for each droplet, circling each, spraying fire, until each droplet flared like a tiny sun.

Yellow Mars, holding closely its two speedy rocks of moons, spun into the screen.

A straggling line of men moved across a desert that whipped them with sheets of yellow dust. A single ship dived from out of the Sun, swooped along the line, licking it with the tongue of flame that streaked behind. As the ship flashed beyond the horizon, a line of smoking rag bundles lay still upon the yellow sand.

DARKNESS closed in upon the television screen in Colonel Halter's office. In the long moment of silence that followed, he thought, *Oh, God, after this awful picture, how can I convince them to come out of the womb of that ship and live again? What reason can I give?*

Immobilizing his face, he saw the half circle of the six old people again in the control room of the old, old ship.

He said, "You'll set down in approximately twenty minutes."

"Yes," agreed the captain, "from where we jumped into space seventy-five years ago. The people of Earth were talking about their problems, not killing each other about them. There was hope. We felt that by the time we'd finished our mission and come back from that other solar system, where a healthy colony could be born, most of those problems would be solved." A pause. "But now there's this terrible killing all through the System. We won't face it."

The roaring of the rockets now as they plunged flame against the concrete slab of the landing field. The bug bodies of the tugs gently easing old *Alpha* to Earth.

Colonel Halter was saying,

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"How about this other solar system? You haven't let us know whether or not you reached it."

"We saw it." There was a hollowness in the captain's voice. "We didn't reach it. But we will. You'll repair the *Alpha* and refuel it."

"As you were saying," prompted Colonel Halter, "you didn't reach it."

"A meteor," said the captain. "Straight into our rockets. Our ship began to drift. The cameras, of course, set in the bulkheads, were watching us."

"May I see? Anything you have to show or say will be strictly between us. I've given orders for our communication to be unrecorded and private. You have my word."

"You'll be allowed to see. I've given my permission."

Colonel Halter thought, *You have given permission?*

Then he saw in his telescreen the little old lady who was Caroline Gordon, dietician and televisor, press a button on the side of her chair. Instantly the picture changed. He heard her voice. "You see the rocket room of the *Alpha* back almost seventy-five years, a few minutes before the accident."

THERE were the four torpedo-like tubes projecting into the cylindrical room; the mass of levers, buttons, wheels and flashing lightspots.

Halter watched John Crowley, the rocketman, broad-shouldered and lithe, turning a wheel at the point of one of the giant tubes.

The next moment, he was flung to the floor. He struggled to his feet, jerked an oxygen mask from the bag at his chest, clamped it to his face and rushed to the tubes. He twirled wheels, pulled levers, pressed buttons. He glanced at the board on which the lightspots had been flashing. Darkness. He pressed a button. A foot-thick metal door swung open. He stepped through it. The door shut and locked.

Leaning against the steel wall at the end of a long companionway, he pulled off his oxygen mask and ran along the companionway toward the control room.

The others met him in the center of the ship.

Crowley saluted the young Captain McClelland.

"The rockets are gone, sir. A meteor."

McClelland did not smile or frown, show sadness or fear or any other emotion. He was tall and slim then, with cropped black hair, its line high on his head. His face was lean and strong-featured. There was a sense of command about the captain.

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Quietly, he said, "We'll all go to the control room."

They followed him as he strode along the companionway.

The telescreen in Colonel Halter's office darkened and there was only the old voice of the captain, saying, "We were drifting in space. You know what that means. But no one broke down. We were too well trained, too well conditioned. We gathered in the control room."

Light opened up again on Colonel Halter's telescreen. He saw the polished metal walls, the pilot chairs and takeoff hammocks, the levers, buttons and switches of the young ship back those many years, and the six young people standing before a young Captain McClelland, who was speaking to them of food, water and oxygen.

It was decided that their metabolisms must be lowered and that they must live for the most part in their bunks. All activity must be cut to minimum. All weapons must be jettisoned, except one, the captain's shock gun, that could not kill but only cause unconsciousness for twenty-four hours.

CAPTAIN McClelland gave an order. The weapons were gathered up and placed in an airlock which thrust them out into space. Five of the crew lay down in their bunks. Dr. Anna Mueller, tall and slim, full-bosomed, tawny-skinned and tawny-haired, remained standing. She pressed the thought recorders over the heads of the other five people who lay there motionless, clamped the tiny electrodes onto her own temples and placed a small, black box, covered with many tiny dials, beside the bunk of Miss Gordon, the televisor.

A moment later, a jumble of thoughts: *Now I am dead. An end. For what, now that it's here? Love. The warm press of a body. Trees and grass. Sunrise. To take poison. Clean air after a rain. City, people, lights. Sunset—*

The thought words jumbled like a voice from a recorder when the speed is turned up.

Then they faded and one thought stream came through clean and clear: *I am Dr. Anna Mueller. Good none of the others can hear what I'm thinking. Was afraid I'd die this way someday. But to prolong it. Painless death in an instant. Could give it to us all. But orders. Captain McClelland. No feeling? Can't he see what I feel for him? Why am I thinking like this? Now. But this is what is happening to me. He'd rather make love to this ship. Kiss Crowley before I give him the metabolism sedation shot. Captain'll see I'm a woman.*

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She stepped to the bulkhead and pressed a button. A medicine cabinet opened. After filling a hypodermic syringe, she went to Crowley, bent down and gave him a long kiss on the lips.

Instantly Colonel Halter heard thoughts.

Captain McClelland: *She must be weak. Why's she doing that? Thought she was stronger. But the ship's the thing. The ship and I.*

Crowley: *What the° hell? Didn't know she went for me. Just a half hour with her before the needle. What's to lose?* He pulled her down to him.

Lieutenant Brady: *He'd do that, the damned animal. But I'm not enough of an animal. I'm a good spaceman. All spontaneity's been trained out of me. Feel like killing him. And taking her. Anyplace. But I'm so controlled. Got to do something. This last time . . .* He sat up in his bunk.

Caroline Gordon: *I knew he was like that. Married when we got back. Mrs. Crowley. And if we'd gotten back. Out every other night with another woman. I could kill him.* She turned her face away.

Daniel Carlyle: *Look at them. And I can't live. Only one person needs me, back on Earth, and she's the only. And that's enough. But maybe I can kill myself . . .* He did not move.

THE thoughts stopped and Colonel Halter leaned forward in his chair as he saw Captain McClelland standing beside his bunk, the gun in his hand. Dr. Mueller saw, too—the young Dr Mueller, back those seventy-five years. She struggled to pull away from Crowley.

Lieutenant Brady stood, started toward the captain, stopped. Crowley pushed Dr. Mueller away from him, leaped to his feet and lunged toward the captain. A stream of light appeared between the gun muzzle and Crowley. He stumbled, caught himself, stood up very straight, then sank down, as though he had been deflated.

The captain motioned Dr. Mueller to her bunk. She hesitated, pain in her face, turned, went to her bunk and lay down. Another stream of light appeared between her and the gun. She lay very still. The needle slipped from her fingers.

The captain turned the gun on Lieutenant Brady, who was coming at him, arms raised. The light beam again. The lieutenant sank back. Caroline Gordon was watching the captain as the light stream appeared. She relaxed, her eyes closed. Daniel Carlyle did not move as the light touched him.

Captain McClelland holstered the gun. He picked up the hypo-

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dermic needle and sterilized it at the medicine cabinet. Then he injected Crowley's arm, filled the hypo four more times, injected the others.

He finally thrust the needle into his own arm and lay down. His breathing began to slow. There was only the control room of the ship now, like some ancient mausoleum, with the six still figures and the control board dark and the eternal ocean of night pressing against the ports.

The picture of the ship's control room began to fade on the screen. After a moment of darkness, the live picture of the six old figures, sitting in their half circle, spread again over the lighted square.

Colonel Halter saw his own image, looking into the old masks.

He said, "And where was *your* weakness, Captain McClelland?"

"I was concerned," said the old voice, "with keeping us alive."

"You weren't aware that some of your crew were emotionally involved with each other?"

"No."

"Are there any more records you could show me?"

"Many more, Colonel, but I don't think it's necessary for you to see them. It would take too long. And we want to get back out into space." He paused. "We can brief you."

"About your going back into space . . . I'm not sure we can allow it."

"Our answer's very simple. There's a button, under my thumb, on the arm of this chair. A little pressure. Carbon monoxide. It would be quick."

"Your idea?"

"Yes. A matter of preserving our integrity. We'd rather die than face the horrors of life on Earth."

HALTER turned to the semicircle of faces. "And you've all agreed to this—this suicide?"

The captain cut in. "Of course. I realized years ago that the only place we could live was in space, in this ship."

"When did your crew realize this?"

"After a couple of years. I told them over and over again, day after day. After all, I am captain. I dictate the policy."

"You've come back. You're in port. You're not in complete command."

"I'll always be in command."

"Perhaps," said Halter quietly. "However, we can come back to that. Please brief me on the records."

Captain McClelland's face hardened as he turned to Dr. Anna Mueller.

She explained, "We regained consciousness twenty-four hours

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after Captain McClelland used the shock gun on us. By then, our metabolisms were high enough to keep us conscious and alive. We could lift nutrition and water capsules to our mouths. We could press the button to activate the exercise mechanisms in our bunks. The output of the air machines was cut down until there was just enough to keep us alive and thinking clearly.

"At intervals of several days, during our exercise and study periods, Captain McClelland turned up the air. We slept. And we dreamed. The dreams are recorded in full. When we could face them, they were played back to us. Our thoughts were played back, too. I conducted group therapy among us. We all grew to understand each other and ourselves, intimately, and now, in relation to our environment, we're perfectly adjusted."

"Did Captain McClelland join you in group therapy?"

"No."

"Why?"

"He was already perfectly adjusted."

SHE frowned faintly, glanced at the captain. "When we were conscious, we studied from the library of microfilm. We read all the great literature of Earth. We watched the great plays and pictures and the paintings and listened to the music. Sometimes our thoughts were hateful. There was self-pity and hysteria. There were times when one or two of us would withdraw almost to the point of death. Then Captain McClelland would knock us out with the shock gun.

"Slowly, over the years, our minds gradually merged into one mind. We thought and created and lived as if we were one person. There grew to be complete and perfect cooperation. And from this cooperation came some great works. Each one of us will tell you. I'll speak first."

She paused. "Psychology has always been my prime interest. My rating at school was genius. My aptitudes were precisely in line with the field of work I chose. Through the years, I've developed a theory, discovered a way to bring about cooperation between all men. This is possible in spite of your wars and hatreds and destruction." Frown creases wrinkled her parchment forehead. "I'd like to know if it would work."

Daniel Carlyle's voice was slightly above a whisper. "All my life, I'd wanted to write poetry. The meteor struck. I realized I wouldn't be allowed to die quickly. I began to do what I'd always wanted to do. The words poured into the thought recorder. Everything I felt and thought is there

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and all I've been able to know and be from this one mind of ours that's in us all. And it's some of the finest poetry that's ever been written." He closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "It'd be good to know if anyone found them inspiring."

"I've always lived for adventure," said Crowley, the rocket-man, his old voice steady and quiet. "I've been the one to quiet down last into the life it was necessary for us to live out there. But my thoughts ran on into distant universes and across endless stretches of space. And so at last, to keep my sanity, I wrote stories of all the adventures I should have had, and more. And in them is all the native power of me, of all adventurers, and the eternal sweep of the Universe where Man will always thrust out to new places." There was a faint trembling in his body and a pained light in his eyes. "Seems I ought to know if they'll ever be read."

IN spite of Brady's frailness, the lieutenant was like a grizzled old animal growling with his last breath. "I was the most capable pilot that ever blasted off from Earth. But I was also an inventor and designer. A lot of the ships Earth pilots are flying today are basically my ideas. After the accident, I wanted to get drunk and make love and then let myself out into space, with a suit, and be there forever. But Captain McClelland's shock gun and the understanding seeping into me from the thought recorders calmed me down eventually.

"So I turned to creation as I lay there in my bunk. I designed many spaceships. And from those, I designed fewer and fewer, incorporating the best from each. And now I have on microfilm a ship that can thrust out to the ends of our galaxy. There aren't any flaws . . . Oh, I tell you, by God, I'd like to see her come to life!"

He leaned back, sweat rolling down his bony cheeks.

Miss Gordon, dietician and televisor, the motionless old lady with cropped, white hair, and face bones across which the paper skin was stretched, said, "There was only one thing I wanted when I knew I couldn't have marriage and a family. There was a perfect food for the human animal. I could find it. I began working on formulas. Over and over again, I put the food elements together and took them apart and put them together again. I threw away the work of years and started over again until at last I had my perfect formula."

She clasped her hands. "Man's nutrition problem is solved. From the oceans and the air and the

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Earth, from the cosmic rays and the lights of the suns and from the particles of the microcosm, Man can take into his body all the nutrition that can enable him to live forever." She sat very still, smiling. "And it's got to be given a try."

Silence.

Colonel Halter watched the old figures sitting like figures in a wax museum, waiting, waiting. He turned a dial. The picture that flashed onto the screen in his office showed the pocked ship standing upright now, like some tree that had grown in the middle of a desert where it was never meant to grow.

The space tugs had streaked out beyond the atmosphere to finish other assignments. There were no crowds, no official cars, no platforms, no bands. Only darkness and silence.

Halter turned a dial. The control room of the old ship flashed back onto the screen. The ancient crew sat as before. Halter saw his own face on their television screen.

Something was missing, he thought. What? What hadn't been said?

And then suddenly it came to him.

The captain. He hadn't spoken of any contribution he had made during those interminable years.

HALTER thought back over Captain McClelland's record. No family. Wiped out when he was a baby in the last war. Educated and raised by the government. Never married. No entanglements with women. No close friends. Ship's captain at twenty-one. No failures. No vacations. No record of breakdown. Perfect physical condition. Strict disciplinarian. More time in space than on Earth by seventy-five per cent. No hobbies. No interest in the arts . . . Apparently no flaw as a spaceman . . . The end product of the stiffest training regimen yet devised by Man.

The ideal captain.

The records of the other five? All showing slight emotional instabilities when checked against the optimum score of a spaceman.

Dr. Mueller—a divorcee. A woman men had sought after. Dedicated in spare time to social psychology. Conflict in her decision as to whether she should go into the private practice of psychotherapy or specialize in space psychology. Interested in the study of neurosis caused by culture.

Lieutenant Brady — family man. Forced himself into mold of good husband and father. Brilliant designer. Ambition also to be space captain. Conflict between these three. Several years

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of psychotherapy which released his drive for adventure in space. *Alpha* mission to be his last. Lack of full leadership qualities prevented him from reaching captaincy.

Rocketman Crowley — typical man of action. Superb physique. Decathlon champion. Continual entanglements with women. Quick temper. Tendency to fight if pushed or crossed. Proud. However, if under good command, best rocketman in the service.

Astrogator Daniel Carlyle — highly sensitive. Psychosomatic symptoms unless out in space. Then in perfect health. Fine mathematician. Highly intuitive, yet logical. Saved four missions from disaster. Holder of Congressional Medal of Honor. Hobby, poetry. Fiancee was boyhood sweetheart.

Dietician and televisor Caroline Gordon—youngest of crew. Twenty years. Too many aptitudes. Tendency toward immaturity. Many hobbies. Idealistic. Emotions unfocused. IQ 165. Success in any field of endeavor concentrated upon. At eighteen, specialized in dietetics and electronics. Highest ratings in field. Stable when under strict external discipline.

NO, thought Halter. None of them fitted space like the completely self-sufficient McClelland, the man who could stand alone against that black, teeming, swirling endlessness of space.

He turned to the captain. The old face was placid, the eyes slightly out of focus.

"Captain McClelland," Halter said sharply.

The pale eyes blinked and looked keenly on Halter's face.

"You want fuel to take you back out into space."

"That's right."

"And if you don't get it, you'll press a button on the arm of your chair and you'll all die of carbon monoxide poisoning."

"Exactly."

"I'm curious about one point." Halter paused. "What did *you* do, Captain, while the others were working on their various projects?"

Captain McClelland scowled at Halter for a long moment. "Why do you want to know that?"

"Your crew members became lost in some work they loved. They told me about it with a certain amount of enthusiasm. You haven't told me what you did. I'd like to know—for the records."

"I watched them, Colonel. I watched them and dreamed of the time when I could take them and the ship back out into space under her own power. I love

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space and I love this ship. I love knowing she's under power and shooting out to the stars. There's nothing more for me."

"What else did you do besides watch them?"

"I activated the machinery that moved my bunk close to the controls. I practiced taking the ship through maneuvers. I kept the controls in perfect working order so I'd be ready to take off again someday."

"If we repaired the ship so you could take off, the first shock of rocket thrust would kill you all."

"We're willing to take that chance."

Colonel Halter looked around the half circle of old faces. "And all your long years of work would be for nothing. Each of you, except Captain McClelland, has made a contribution to Earth and Man. You're needed here, not in the emptiness of space."

He saw the eyes of the five watching him intently; saw a tiny flicker of surprise and interest on their faces.

"You're destroying Earth," said the captain, his voice rising, "with your wars and your quarrels. We've all of us found peace. We're going to keep it."

HALTER ignored the captain and looked at the five.

"There are many of us on Earth, who are fighting a war without blood, to save mankind. We've made progress. We've worked out agreements among the warring nations to do their fighting on the barren planets where there aren't any native inhabitants, so noncombatants on Earth won't be killed and so the Earth won't be laid waste. That was the fighting you saw while you were coming in.

"This is just *one* example. And there're a lot of us contributing ideas and effort. If all of us who're working for Earth were to leave it and go out into space, the ones who have to fight wars would make the Earth as barren as the Moon. This is our place in the Universe and it's got to be saved."

"We've adjusted to the control room of this ship and to each other," said McClelland flatly. "Our work's done."

"Let's put it like this, Captain. Maybe *your* work's done. Maybe *you're* not interested in what happens to Earth." Halter turned to the others. "But what *you've* done adds up to a search for answers here on Earth. Poetry. Design of a flawless spaceship. A psychological theory. A perfect diet. Novels about Man pushing out and out into space. All this indicates a deep concern for the health of humanity and its success."

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"We're not concerned," retorted the captain, "with the health or success of humanity."

Halter sharply examined the other faces. He saw a flicker of sadness in one, anger in another, uncertainty, fear, joy.

He said, "For seventy-five years, you obey your captain. You listen to what he says. And everything is a command. Yet in yourselves you feel a drive to carry out your ideas, your creations, to their logical ends. Which means, will they work when they're applied to Man? Will people read the novels? Will they catch the meaning of the poetry? Will the spaceships really work as they're supposed to? Will the psychological theory really promote cooperation? Is there supreme health in this marvelous diet?"

He gave them a moment to think and then continued. "But if you continue to follow the commands of the captain, you'll be dead before you're out of the Earth's atmosphere. You'll never know. Maybe Man will prove that your great works are only dreams . . . But I think there's a great need in you to know, one way or the other."

THERE was a faint stirring among them, like that of ancient machines being activated after years of lying dormant. They glanced at each other. They fidgeted. Trouble twisted their faces.

"Colonel Halter," said the captain, "I'm warning you. My thumb is on the button. I'll release the gas. Do we get the repairs and the fuel to take off from Earth, or don't we?"

Colonel Halter leaned grimly toward the captain. "You've spent fifty years with one idea—to stay out in space forever. You've made no effort to create or do one single constructive act. I'll tell you whether or not you get the fuel and the repairs—*after* I hear what someone in your crew has to say."

Silence hung tensely between the control room of the ship and Colonel Halter's office on Earth. The captain was glaring now at Halter. A tear showed in the corner of each of Dr. Anna Mueller's old eyes. Lieutenant Brady was gripping the arms of his chair. Daniel Carlyle's eyes were closed and his head shook slightly, as though from palsy. There was a faint, enigmatic smile on Caroline Gordon's face. The cords on Crowley's neck stood out through the tan and wrinkled wrapping-paper skin.

By God, thought Halter, *they're all sane except the captain. And they've got to do it. They've got to come out on their own steam or die in that control*

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room.

"I'm waiting," he said. "Is your work going to die and you with it?"

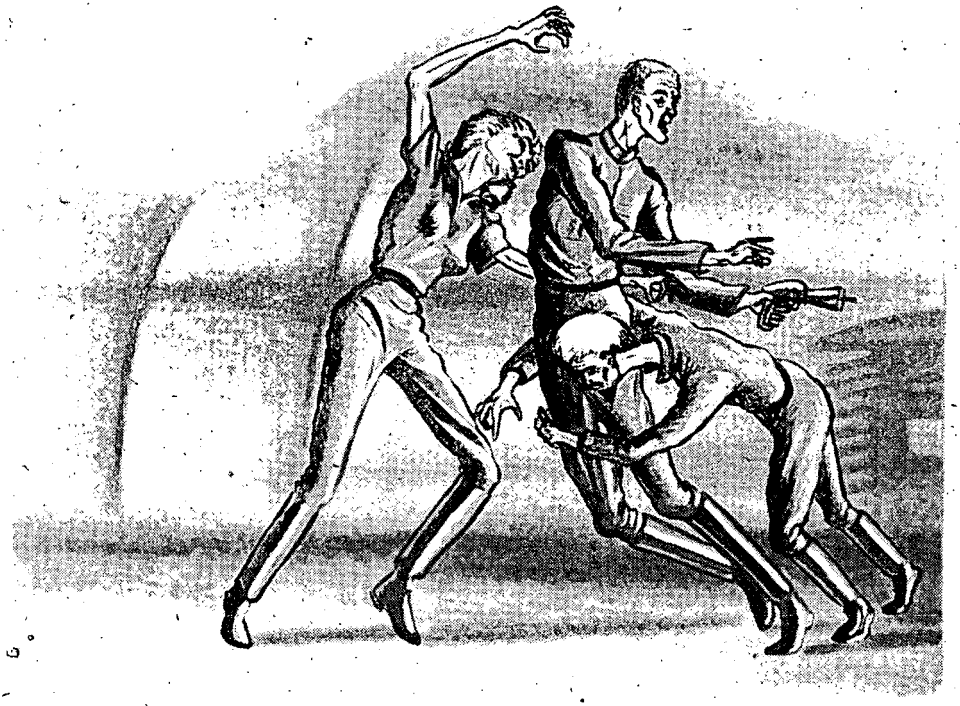
"We'll leave all the records," said the captain, his thumb poised over the button on the arm of his chair. "That's enough."

Halter ignored him. "Each of you can help. You've only done part of the work." He stood and struck the desk with the flat of his hand. "Damn it, say something, one of you!"

Still the silence and the flickering looks all around.

Halter heard a sob. He saw Dr. Anna Mueller's head drop forward and her shoulders tremble. The others were staring at her, as if she had suddenly materialized among them, like a ghost.

Then her voice, through the trembling and the faint crying: "I've—I've got to know."



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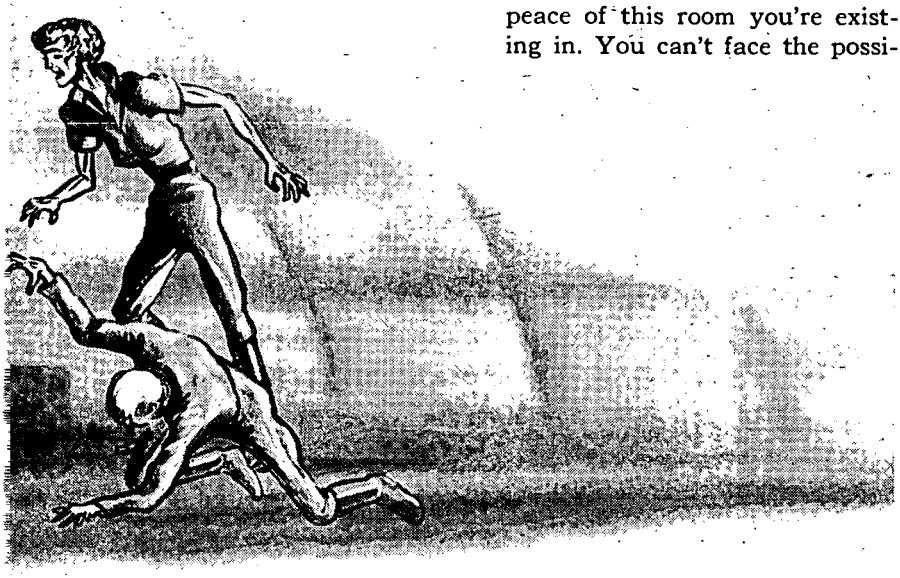
The captain got creakily to his feet. "Dr. Mueller! Do you want me to use the gun again?"

She raised her face to his. There was pain in it. "I've—got work to do. There's so—little time."

"That's right. On this ship. You're part of the crew. There'll be plenty of work once we get out in space again."



"I've got to see if my theory's right."

"Colonel Halter," said the captain, "this is insubordination. Mutiny."

HE raised the gun tremblingly, pointed the black muzzle at Dr. Mueller, sighted along the barrel.

"Wait," said Halter. "You're right."

Captain McClelland hesitated.

"It's quite plain," went on Halter, "that Dr. Mueller is alone among you. She wants to come out and go on with her work. The rest of you want the closed-in uterine warmth and peace of this room you're existing in. You can't face the possibility of failure. So I'm afraid she'll have to be sacrificed. After all, you do need a full crew to move the ship—even if you are all dead a few seconds after blastoff." He paused, looking in-

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tently at Brady, Crowley, Carlyle, Gordon, where they sat in the half circle, staring back at him. "So—"

Lieutenant Brady struggled up from his chair.

"I've got twenty-five years of life. I've some ships to design."

"That goes for me, too," said Crowley, the rocketman. "Will anybody want to read my novels?"

Astrogator Carlyle leaned forward. "There are many more poems to be written."

"Give me a soundproof laboratory," said Caroline Gordon. "I'll add another fifty years to all your lives."

"I'm afraid it is mutiny, Captain," said Halter.

The captain started toward his chair, his hand reaching for the button on its arm.

Lieutenant Brady stumbled forward, blocking his way.

Halter could only watch, thinking, *It's up to them. They've got to do it now!*

He saw the captain draw his shock gun; saw light flare at its muzzle; saw Lieutenant Brady crumple like a collapsing skeleton.

Crowley reached forward, grasping McClelland's shoulder. The gun swung toward him. A stream of light squirted into his middle. Crowley fell forward, pulling the captain down with him. The three other oldsters were above the three black figures sprawled on the floor, like tangled puppets. They hesitated a moment, then fell upon the ones below them, black arms and legs twitching about now like the legs of dying spiders, struggling weakly.

A flash of light exploded beneath these twisting black reeds and streaks of it shot out all through the waving black cluster.

The next moment, they settled and were quiet.

THERE was a stillness in the ancient control room, like the stillness in a sunken ship at the bottom of the sea. It lingered for a long time, while Colonel Halter watched and waited.

Dr. Mueller's voice, seventy-five years tired, said, "He's—quiet now. Please come and take us out."

Colonel Halter switched on his desk visiophone.

"They're coming out," he said quietly. "I'll be there to supervise."

On the visiophone, the general's image nodded. "Congratulations, Colonel. How are they?"

"There'll be one case for psycho. Captain McClelland."

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed the general. "From his record, I thought he'd never break!"

"Let's say he couldn't bend,

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sir." A pause. "And yet he did keep them from destroying themselves."

"He'll be made well again . . . What about the others?"

"I think they, too, are very great and human people."

"Well," said the general, "they're *your* patients. I'll see you at the ship in five minutes."

"I'll be there, sir." Colonel Halter flipped the switch. The visiophone blanked out. He looked at the television screen.

The six black-clothed figures were quiet on the floor of their ship's control room. They reminded him of sleeping children curled together for warmth.

As he left his office and walked out into the humming city, he felt drained, still shaking with tension, realizing even now how close he had come to failure.

But there was the scarred and pitted needle-nosed old hull, bright with moonlight, standing like a monument against the night sky.

Not a monument to the past, though.

It marked the birthplace of the future . . . and he had been midwife. He felt his shoulders straighten at the knowledge as he walked toward the ancient ship.

—RICHARD STOCKHAM

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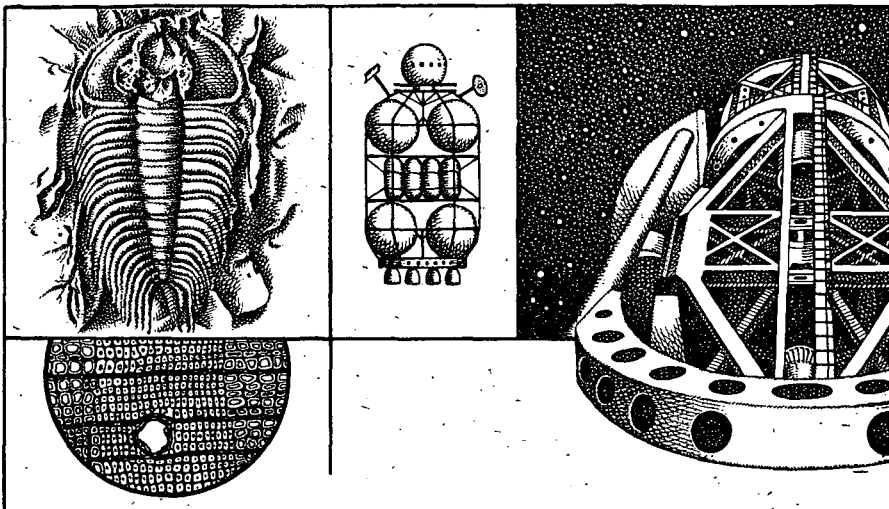

for your information

By WILLY LEY

CALENDAR TROUBLE

READING idly through an old book, Camille Flammarion's *Dreams of an Astronomer,* I happened across the sentence: "As with us, there is no integral number of days in the Martian year. Perhaps their calendar has also been reformed several times without being made perfect. But let us hope that they are not as stupid as we are, with our months of 28, 29, 30 and 31 days and with our three days

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of days—the commercial day which begins at midnight, the astronomical day which begins the following noon and the naval day which commenced the previous noon." This, combined with a letter asking about the meaning of the names of the weekdays, reminded me that, one year ago, I had the best of intentions of devoting the first column of the new year to the appropriate discussion of New Year.

I don't remember just what got in my way a year ago, but no matter—one January issue is as good as another January issue to think about the thing we live by: the calendar. I feel quite certain that I am not the only one who is thinking about the problem at this time of the year. Comes New Year's Day, you'll probably read in your daily paper that State Senator Soandso is all in favor of a calendar revision, and if you watch the letter column, you'll find a reply in which the Senator is denounced as a heathen-in-disguise, a man of ill will or at least a moron. This might well be followed by another letter declaring that the original letter writer described himself perfectly.

DISREGARDING such pleasantries, there remains the very simple fact that the calendar is *not* perfect—something I encounter myself roughly once a day. Somebody wants to know whether I'd be available for a lecture on, say, January 25 or whether I'd prefer January 28. First thing I have to do is see if one of these days is a Monday; for family reasons, Mondays are inconvenient to me. Or a transportation schedule may hinge on the problem of whether there will be four or five Sundays in October. (Don't look it up; try to guess.) I am also slightly tired of the routine—so frequently needed in historical research—of figuring out whether May 1st, 1898, was a Sunday. (It was.)

When I was a small boy, I learned that I had been born on a Tuesday and, remembering that my most recent birthday had not been on a Tuesday, I wanted to know what had happened to my birthday. I am not certain whether I got an explanation I did not understand or whether (as is more likely) I was simply told that I wasn't old enough to understand; at any event, I wished then that a birthday would come on the same day. I still think it should. Now I know, of course, why this isn't the case. But I also know that it could be.

However, let's begin at the beginning. The roots of the trouble are two simple astronomical facts. One is that the Earth needs 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds to go around the Sun

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once. If it needed 360 days or 372 days, things would be better—though not yet "fine"—and in the face of natural law, one would even be willing to settle for 365¼ days. That is one of the difficulties; the year does not consist of a number of whole days. The other is that we have a moon.

I admit at the outset that it is a very pretty moon. It is one of the biggest in the Solar System and its existence helped to get several sciences and assorted interesting and exasperating superstitions going. It is a challenge to space travel and all that.

The trouble is that primitive peoples, at a time when artificial clocks were still to be invented, used it as a clock. The waxing and waning of the Moon was easily visible and time reckoning based itself almost automatically on the lunar phases.

But the natural rhythm of life is the daily change from light to darkness and back to light again, based on the apparent movement of the Sun. The Moon, large and luminous and conspicuous as it was, could not do away with the day. Time reckoning, as a consequence, became a mixture of solar and lunar phenomena; time expressions were of solar or lunar origin, depending on the time interval to be expressed.

A messenger was to return either when the shadows lengthened, or else after the Sun had taken two baths in the ocean. That was solar. But if it was a long trip, the messenger might not be back until after the Moon had twice renewed itself. That, of course, was lunar. If the trip was really long, it might happen that the voyagers would not return until two winters had gone by—solar reckoning again.

AS long as you could be lavish with a few days, all this did not matter. The difficulties began when people tried to pin time down a little more accurately, such as for the purpose of a festival. Just how many days are there between two "moons"? Answer (modern): 29.5305879. And how many "moons" between two winters? A disturbing 12.3682668.

Now you either know these unpleasant figures or you don't and believe that you are dealing with 29½ days and 12½ "moons." If you believe the latter, your calendar will get out of order rapidly. If you do know the figures, you realize that these things do not mesh and you struggle for a compromise which somehow fits the days, the seasons and the phases of the Moon together.

None of the many attempts made at various times by various people was ever completely successful; none *can* be successful since the actual units are not

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commensurable. However, the job can be simplified and the result improved if you throw out one of the incommensurable units, namely, the phases of the Moon.

This, in fact, was done in the oldest calendar we know of, the Egyptian calendar. Life in Egypt was based on the flooding of the Nile, an annual event, and their calendar had three seasons, named Flood Time, Seed Time and Harvest Time.

Each season was subdivided into four months, so that a full year contained twelve months. They used the same figure, twelve, to subdivide night and day into smaller units, the hours. But the early Egyptian hours were based on the actual times of daylight and night, so that the length of an hour changed with the seasons, which accounts for their Latin name of *horae temporales*, the "temporary hours." Each Egyptian month contained 30 days and began with a festival. Each month gradually acquired the name of the festival with which it started.

But this accounted for only 360 days. As for the remaining five days, the Egyptians decided that they were not worth much trouble, so they bunched them up at the end of the year and seem to have treated them as a holiday week.

Simple, eh?

In 238 B.C., Ptolemy Euergetes (not *the* Ptolemy, Claudius Ptolemaeus) pointed out that, every four years, six days should be added instead of five, but his suggestion didn't find any friends. Some two hundred years later, when Cajus Julius Caesar had decreed a calendar for the Roman Empire, the Egyptian officials, knowing what was good for them, finally consented to an extra day every four years. But not all Egyptians felt obliged to do so.

WITH all its shortcomings, the Egyptian calendar was the first "real" calendar, if that term is taken to mean a fixed scheme, a schedule, a time table upon which to base operations.

By contrast, the Babylonian calendar, though probably older, was not "real." It had a year of 12 months, based on actual observation of the Moon. A thirteenth month was added whenever it became necessary to get the lunar phases and the seasons together again.*

*The Mayan calendar, unnecessarily complicated by the introduction of Venus, has been highly overpublicized. It consisted of 18 months of 20 days with five or six "unlucky days" added, so unlucky that only unpostponable things like eating were done. It is true that it was accurate, but the Mayan system of counting was poor and the calendar so intricate that it was described as "wheels within wheels" by more critical archeologists.

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Before Caesar issued his calendar decree in 46 B.C., the Romans had struggled along with a calendar of 355 days. Even that, believe it or not, had been an improvement.

The original Roman calendar had consisted of *ten* lunar months, beginning the year with March and ending in December. The intervening period of about 60 days was simply neglected — why bother counting winter months? (The Vikings are said to have done the same, with a little more justification as to climate, I should think.)

Then the Romans added January and February at the end of the year, but this came out with a total of 354 days. Because even numbers were unlucky to the Romans, a 355th day was tacked on.

Of course, this still did not make the seasons come out evenly, so, every two years, an extra month was added. Its name was *Mercedonius,* which can best be translated as "extra pay" (for the legions) and to show that this was not a normal month, *Extra Pay* began after February 23rd, running for 22 or 23 days, after which the last week of February finished up the year.

Around 300 B.C., one Cneius Flavius changed things around a little more, making all months uneven so that they should be lucky, taking the needed days away from February to give it an even number of days (ours still remains 28) because the last month of the year should be unlucky.

So the year began with March of 31 days, followed by April with 29 days, May again had 31 and June 29, *Quintilis* (the fifth month) again 31, *Sextilis* (the sixth) 29, September 29, October 31, November, December and January 29 each and the 12th month, February, the same unlucky 28.

Every second year, of course, you had *Mercedonius* interrupting February. Four years in succession, then, had 355, 378, 355 and 377 days, which made every year one day too long.

In the middle of all this, they shifted the beginning of the year to January 1st, since this was the day newly elected consuls took office. The result is that October still means "the eighth" month, but it is actually the tenth, November, the "ninth," is the eleventh and December, the "tenth," is, of course, the twelfth.

How's that for sheer infuriating mixup?

CAESAR, having been elected *Pontifex Maximus* in 63 B.C., disliked a calendar in which two successive years could not be compared, either in military op-

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erations or in tax collections. His model was the Egyptian calendar, with the "added days" evenly distributed throughout the year and an extra day every fourth year.

Caesar, or maybe his advisors, thought that the solar year was 365 days and 6 hours, making it about 11¼ minutes too long, which is a lot.

But the introduction of the new calendar was not enough. The spring equinox had meanwhile strayed some 90 days from the date where it belonged. So Caesar took the year we now call 46 B.C.

It being a "long" year anyway, containing a 23-day *Mercedonius,* Caesar added two more "Decembers," one of 33 and one of 34 days, stretching the year to 445 days. His enemies called it the "Year of Confusion," to which the Caesar's friends replied that it was the "Last Year of Confusion."

When it was all over, the Senate decided to honor him by renaming the month of his birth, *Quintilis,* after him—our July. Later, *Sextilis* was named after Augustus, but the old story that Augustus took a day from another month for his own month is a fable. The length of the months in Caesar's calendar was the same as in ours, except that, in leap year, February acquired *two* 24th days, so that it might remain an unlucky month with an even number of days.

The Romans not only gave us the names of the months, but also the names of the days, based on complicated astrological reasoning.

The seven astrological planets were thought to influence the hours, with the most distant having first influence. So the first hour of a day would be influenced by Saturn, the next by Jupiter, the next by Mars, the next by the Sun and so on down the list through Venus, Mercury and the Moon.

This cycle repeated twice, but there were still three hours left in the day for another repeat to start, so that the first hour of the next day would be "influenced" by the Sun. In the same manner, the Moon succeeded to the first hour of the third day, the planet Mars to the first hour of the fourth day, Mercury started the fifth, Jupiter the sixth and Venus the seventh day. The first hour of the next day was again ruled by Saturn and the cycle started over.

All this did not originate in Rome. Some of these astrological ideas go back as far as there are records, but it was the Latin expression of these thoughts which resulted in the actual names of the days.

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LATIN	FRENCH	SAXON	ENGLISH	GERMAN
Dies Solis	Dimanche	Sunnan-daeg	Sunday	Sonntag
Dies Lunae	Lundi	Monan-daeg	Monday	Montag
Dies Martis	Mardi	Tiwes-daeg	Tuesday	Dienstag
Dies Mercurii	Mercredi	Wodans-daeg	Wednesday	Mittwoch
Dies Jovis	Jeudi	Thors-daeg	Thursday	Donnerstag
Dies Veneris	Vendredi	Frigas-daeg	Friday	Freitag
Dies Saturni	Samedi	Saeter-daeg	Saturday	Sonnabend } Samstag }

French differs from Latin only with respect to the name of Sunday, where Dieu *(God) has been substituted for Sol (Sun). Modern English follows the Saxon system, using Sun and Moon and five Saxon gods, Tiw (Tioo), Wodan, Thor (or Donar) and Frigga (or Freya), but the characteristics and attributes of these gods correspond closely to the Roman gods. (In Latin, of course, the word may refer to the god as well as to the planet.)*

The similarity between Saeter-daeg or Saturday and Dies Saturnis *is accidental. Behind the Saxon name is the Norse divinity Saeter—although some etymologists consider the alternate (and more prosaic) explanation of Thvatt-daeg as "wash day" or "bath day!"*

Modern German follows the same usage as Saxon except for Wednesday, which is Mittwoch *(Middle of the Week), and Saturday. The North German form* Sonnabend *means Sunday Eve; the South German form of* Samstag *is an adaptation of the French* Samedi.

SLOWLY, the much older week —a lunar month quartered into four weeks of seven days each —crept back into Caesar's calendar and Emperor Constantine introduced it officially, replacing the older method of reckoning by the *calends, nones* and *ides* of the months. This interrupted the continuity that might otherwise have existed, for neither 365 nor 366 is divisible by seven. Hence the new year did not start with the same weekday with which the previous year had begun.

Moreover, as time went by, it turned out that the "Julian Year" itself did not fit precisely. Remember that it was about 11¼ minutes too long. That does not sound like much, but in the course of ten centuries, the error accumulates to a very noticeable eight days. By the year 1580, the vernal equinox, put by Caesar on March 25th, had drifted to

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March 11th. If this was not corrected somehow, Easter would land in mid-winter and all other holidays would be dislocated, too. It was clearly time for another revision.

Pope Gregory XIII, after most careful consideration, cleared the matter up by issuing a papal bull which decreed that the day following October 4, 1582, was to be called October 15th. This change brought the vernal equinox back to the 21st of March, where it had been in 325 A.D., the year of the Council of Nicaea, which had issued the rules for computing the date of Easter.

To avoid a recurrence of the drifting of the vernal equinox, the leap year rule was modified. Caesar had decreed that every fourth year was a leap year. The papal bull added that full centuries could not be leap years, unless they were divisible by 400. The year 1600, then, was a leap year and the year 2000 will be one; but 1700, 1800 and 1900 were not. This correction of the leap year rule, coupled with the elimination of ten days in 1582, constitutes what is now called the Gregorian calendar. Its average year works out as being 26 seconds longer than is accurate, but this error is so small that more than 33 centuries have to pass before a single day will have to be dropped.

THE revision of the calendar was adopted at once in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Poland. Holland, Flanders and the Catholic sections of Germany followed a year later. Protestant Germany refused and so did England, because the rule came from the Pope. Hungary followed suit in 1587.

Switzerland presented the strangest picture, for there the revision was accepted canton by canton; for centuries, it was as if Connecticut had one calendar, Wisconsin another and Florida a third. The Catholic cantons accepted the revision at once, but the Protestant cantons stubbornly refused.

In 1700, Denmark and Protestant Germany turned "Gregorian." That pulled a few more cantons along. But the last of them did not yield until 1812, for they were stout Calvinists. They would not accept anything papal under any circumstances, but they found themselves forced to by commercial necessity and utter confusion.

When England followed suit in 1752, the discrepancy had grown into eleven days. Simultaneously, New Year's Day was changed from March 25 to January 1st. There was rioting and there were stories that cattle still kneeled on "true Christmas," but refused to kneel on "Papal Christmas"

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and for a long time letters and legal documents were dated

$$\frac{19}{30} \text{ June } 1753$$

$$\frac{30\text{th June}}{11\text{th July}} \ 1753$$

$$\frac{23\text{rd Feb. } 1753}{6\text{th March } 1754}$$

England had no monopoly on calendar riots. Poland had experienced them and so had some German states. People refused "to give up" eleven days of their lives. Of course the longer a country waited, the more days had to be dropped. Japan experienced that in 1873, Albania in 1912 and Rumania in 1924. The most sturdy opposition was found in Russia.

For many centuries, Russia had lacked a calendar completely, the peasants getting along with reference to the Moon and to seasons, the educated people using a western calendar while in western countries.

The first Russian calendar is stated to have been written in 1670 under the reign of Czar Alexis Mikhailovitch. But it stayed in manuscript form. Under the reign of the next Czar, Peter the Great, the first printed Russian calendar was published, naming Yakov Williamovitch Brus as the author.

Unfortunately for Peter the Great and all the Russians, Yakov Williamovitch Brus was really James William Bruce, an Englishman whose father had fled from Oliver Cromwell's England and entered the Russian Civil Service. Consequently, the calendar was the Julian calendar, not the Gregorian revision.

Around 1790, the Russian Foreign Office, the Merchant Marine and the Navy grew tired of putting two dates on every letter and asked for a change of policy. Prince Lieven was to submit the proposal to Czar Nicholas I, but Prince Lieven was worried because he had heard about the English calendar riots. Russia couldn't afford riots. The matter languished until the Czar finally decided, in 1829, to forbid reform.

At a later date, Professor Dimitri Mendeleyeff, armed with the latest astronomical figures supplied by Simon Newcomb in Washington, did try to cause a reform, and he and his friends even formed a society for the purpose. But the old *ukas* stood; it needed the "October Revolution" (which took place on November 7) to bring about a revision. After a short period of investigation—some city soviets meanwhile wondered whether they should not use the French Revolutionary calendar—the offi-

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cial Russian calendar jumped 13 days.

Oh, yes, that French Revolutionary calendar. Nothing ever miscarried so completely in so short a time. And it had not even been conceived by the revolutionary parties!

Though they coined the term "First Year of the Republic," their calendar was ready more than one year preceding the revolution. It bore originally the name of *Calendar of Honest Men* and its author had been Monsieur Pierre Sylvain Maréchal. As a piece of calendar-making, it was feeble indeed. There were 12 months of 30 days apiece, each month subdivided into three *décades* and five or six holidays, one after every second month, to be named after Honest Men.

The King of France made the tactical error of ordering Monsieur Maréchal's almanac seized and burned, thereby calling attention to it. Since it seemed to be—or, better, could be made out to be—an early martyr of the *révolution,* it was later adopted.

The revolutionary year began on the day declared to be the Birthday of the Republic, "by lucky coincidence, the day of the autumnal equinox, September 22nd, old style." The month beginning on that day was named *Vendémiaire* (Vintage), followed by *Brumaire* (Fog), *Frimaire* (Sleet), *Nivôse* (Snow, beginning Dec. 21st), *Pluviôse* (Rain) and *Ventôse* (Wind). The first of the spring months was *Germinal* (Seed, beginning March 21st). *Floréal* and *Prairial* (Blossom and Pasture) followed. The three summer months were the last of the year, named, in proper order, *Messidor, Thermidor* and *Fructidor* — Harvest, Heat and Fruit.

I am not even certain whether Monsieur Maréchal invented all these names himself. They bear much resemblance to the so-called German Peasant's Calendar which is the Gregorian calendar with different names. December, for example, is *Yule,* January is *Hartung* (hard month), February is *Hornung* (because animals shed their "horns," i.e., antlers), November is *Nebelung* (from *Nebel,* meaning fog, etc.) About half of these names are the same in meaning as those of the French revolutionary calendar. I suspect that French peasants may have used them before they got into print in 1788.

The French revolutionary calendar was actually not used by the revolutionaries. Even their official *Moniteur* added the Gregorian dates for the sake of clarity. Napoleon threw it out in 1806 to the extreme delight of everybody, friend and foe, and

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nothing is left of it but a name on the menu: Lobster Thermidor.

A CALENDAR like the Gregorian, which will not drift by more than a single day in 3300 years, is a remarkable accomplishment and nobody in his right mind ever suggested doing anything further to its main unit, the year. But there have been suggestions of rearranging the smaller units inside the year.

The main problem is posed by the week. A normal year has 52 weeks and one extra day; a leap year has 52 weeks and two extra days. As early as 1834, an Italian priest, the Abbé Marco Mastrofini, suggested that this extra day should simply be "removed" from the year so that the calendar year would consist of a year (of 364 days) *and* a day—reminiscent of the British guinea, which is a pound *and* a shilling.

If we tack one "bland day" at the end of each year (two at the end of a leap year), every year would begin with a Sunday and consequently every date would always fall on the same weekday.

Father Mastrofini's suggestion was taken up by the French Astronomical Society in 1887 . . . but in the meantime, a French philosopher, Auguste Comte, had confused the issue. In 1849, he published his plan for a 13-month calendar. Each month was to have 28 days (the nearest thing to one lunation) and there were to be one (or two) blank days at the end of the year. It was an attempt to combine solar and lunar elements, but apparently Comte failed to realize that even if 13 months of 28 days were 13 "moons," the blank days would throw the calendar out of gear again as far as the lunar elements were concerned.

In addition to the 13 months, August Comte also proposed renaming them after Moses, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Buddha, Plato, Socrates, Newton, etc. Although rejected by almost everybody, the Comte calendar retained a small fellowship, presumably composed of people who wanted to prove that they were not afraid of the figure 13.

After the First World War, the proposal was revived under the sponsorship of George Eastman and dubbed the "businessman's calendar." Of course Eastman did not want Comte's fancy names; he needed only a single new name, one for the 13th month. *Mercedonius* would have been especially suited for a businessman's calendar, but the most serious contenders were *Sol* and *Liberty*. To most people, however, it was still a 13th month and they liked it even less when, with the fixed weekday dates, it turned out that

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it produced a Friday the Thirteenth thirteen times a year.

WHAT was more important was that the thing simply was not practical. A 13-month calendar, no matter how well advertised, is *not* a businessman's calendar. One large firm is said to have used it internally for an experiment, with complete chaos resulting. The businessman wants to compare the first week of March in two years, or the first fall month of two years, and he is used to quarterly statements and semi-annual inventories or accountings. You cannot do that with a 13-month calendar unless you tear a month apart.

A German "improvement," the Blochmann calendar, suggested just that. It took the quarter as the important business unit, each quarter consisting of three months of 28 days each, plus one separate "unattached" week, called Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter Week, respectively. Plus one Year End day. Plus, every fourth year, one Leap Year Day.

The revision now under discussion—it got as far as the United Nations—is the so-called World Calendar, which goes back to Mastrofini's simple proposal, improved by an adjustment of the months.

January is to have 31 days, February 30 and March 30. This rhythm of 31/30/30 repeats each quarter. Each 31-day month has five Sundays; every other month, four Sundays. January 1st is always a Sunday and each quarter begins with a Sunday and ends with a Saturday. Not counting special holidays, every month has 26 working days, if you count Saturdays and working days. But the holidays will always fall on the same weekday—July 4th on a Wednesday, for example. The extra day would be Year End Day between December 30th and January 1st. In leap years, Leap Year Day would come in the middle of the year, between June 30th and July 1st.

This World Calendar would be much more a businessman's calendar than Eastman's, which merely bore that name.

The adoption of the World Calendar is opposed *on principle* by three religious groups: the Seventh Day Adventists, the Seventh Day Baptists and Orthodox Judaism. But the example of Orthodox Judaism shows how discrepancies between everyday necessity and religious convictions can be overcome, namely by following one calendar for everyday business and another for religious purposes.

No room for letters and discussions this month. They'll be back in the February issue.

—WILLY LEY

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You've never read science fiction like this before. It's a shock wave of terror—with a jolting, blinding conclusion. It's Sturgeon!

When You're Smiling

By THEODORE STURGEON

Illustrated by STONE

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NEVER tell the truth to humans.

I can't recall having formulated that precept; I do know I've lived under it all my life.

But *Henry*?

It couldn't matter with Henry.

You might say Henry didn't count.

And who would blame me? Being me, I'd found, was a lonely job. Doing better things than other people—and doing them better to boot—is its own reward, up to a point. But to find out about those murders, those dozens and dozens of beautiful scot-free murders, and then not to be able to tell anyone . . . well, I act like a human being in so many other ways—

And besides, it's only Henry.

When I was a kid in school, I had three miles to go and used roller skates except when it was snowing. Sometimes it got pretty cold, occasionally too hot, and often wet; but rain or shine, Henry was there when I got to the building. That was twenty years ago, but all I have to do is close my eyes to bring it all back, him and his homely, doggy

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face, his odd flexible mouth atwist with laughter and welcome. He'd take my books and set them by the wall and rub one of my hands between his two if it was cold, or toss me a locker-room towel if it was wet or very hot.

I never could figure out why he did it. It was more than just plain hero-worship, yet Lord knows he got little enough from me.

THAT went on for years, until he graduated. I didn't do so well and it took me longer to get out. I don't think I really tried to graduate until after Henry did; the school suddenly seemed pretty bleak, so I did some work and got clear of it.

After that, I kicked around a whole lot looking for a regular income without specializing in anything, and found it writing features for the Sunday supplement of one of those newspapers whose editorial policies are abhorrent to decent people, but it's all right; no decent person reads them.

I write about floods, convincingly describing America's certain watery grave, and I write about drought and the vanishing water table, visualizing our grandchildren expiring on barren plains that are as dry as a potato-chip. Then there's the perennial collision with a wandering planet, and features about nuts who predicts the end of the world, and biographies of great patriots cut to size so they won't conflict with the editorial page. It's a living, and when you can compartment it away from what you think, none of it bothers you.

So a lot of things happened and twenty years went by, and all of a sudden I ran into Henry.

The first funny thing about him was that he hadn't changed. I don't think he had even grown much. He still had the coarse hair and the ugly wide mouth and the hot happy eyes. The second funny thing was the way he was dressed, like always, in hand-me-downs: a collar four sizes too large, a baggy suit, a raveled sweater that would have fought bitterly with his old herringbone if both weren't so faded.

He came wagging and panting up to me this early fall day when everyone in sight but Henry was already wearing a topcoat. I knew him right away and I couldn't help myself; I just stood there and laughed at him. He laughed, too, glad to the groveling point, not caring why I was laughing, but simply welcoming laughter for its own sake. He said my name indistinctly, again and again; Henry almost always spoke indistinctly because of that grin he wore half around his head.

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"Well, come on!" I bellowed at him, and then cussed at him. It always made him wince, and it did now. "I'll buy you a drink. I'll buy you nine drinks!"

"No," he said, smiling, backing away a little, bobbing his head in that funny way, as if he was about to duck. "I can't right now."

It seemed to me he was looking at my sharp-creased dacron suit, or maybe the pearl homburg. Or maybe he just caught my eye on his old set of threads. He waggled his hands aimlessly in front of him, like an old woman caught naked and not knowing what to cover up. "I don't drink."

"You'll drink," I said.

I took him by the wrist and marched him down to the corner and into Molson's, while he tugged ineffectually at me and mumbled things from between his solid, crooked teeth. I wanted a drink and I needed a laugh, right *now*, and I wasn't going to drag all the way down to Skid Row just to keep him from feeling conspicuous.

SOMEBODY was sitting in a back booth—someone I especially didn't want to see. Be seen by. I don't think I broke stride when I saw her, though. Hell, the day won't come when I can't handle the likes of her . . .

"Siddown," I said, and Henry had to; I pushed him and the edge of the seat hit the backs of his knees. I sat down, too, giving him the hip hard enough to slide those worn old tweeds of his back into the corner where he wouldn't be able to get out unless I moved first. "Steve!" I roared, just as though I didn't care if anyone in the place knew I was there. Steve was on his way, but I always yelled like that; it bothered him. Steve's also sort of a funny guy.

"Awright, awright," he complained. "What'll you have?"

"What are you drinking, Henry?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing for me."

I snorted at him and said to Steve, "Two sour-mash an' soda on the side."

Steve grunted and went away.

"Really," Henry said, with his maybe-I-better-duck wobble, "I don't want any. I don't drink."

"Yes, you do," I told him. "Now what's with you? Come on, right from the beginning. From school. I want the story of your life—trials and triumphs, toils 'n' tragedies."

"*My* life?" he asked, and I think he was genuinely puzzled. "Oh, I haven't done anything. I work in a store," he added. When I just sat there shaking my head at him, he looked down at his hands and pulled them abruptly

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down into his lap as if he was ashamed of the nails. "I know, I know, it's nothing much." He looked at me with that peculiar hot gaze. "Not like you, with a piece in the paper every week and all."

Steve came with the bourbon. I shut up until he'd gone. With Steve, I like to pretend I have big business and don't trust him to listen in. I swear sometimes you can hear him grinding his teeth. He never says anything, though. A good customer's got just a little more rights than just anybody else, so there's nothing he can do about it. He just works there.

When he'd gone, I said, "Here's to the twist that don't exist, and her claim there's a game that can't be played. Here's to the wise old lies we use—"

"Honest, I don't want any," said Henry.

"If I'm going to be hospitable, you're going to be housebroke," I told him, and picked up his glass and shoved it at his face.

He got his lips on it just in time to keep it from falling into that oversize collar. He didn't take but a sip, and that great big mouth snapped down to button-size as if it had a drawstring on it. His eyes got round and filled with tears; he tried to hold the liquor on his tongue, but he sneezed through his nostrils and swallowed and started to cough.

Laugh? I got my breath back just this side of hernia. Some day I'll plant a sound camera and do that again and make an immortal out of old Henry.

"Gosh!" he gasped when he could.

HE wiped his eyes with his frayed sleeves. I guess he didn't have a handkerchief. "That *hurt*." But he was grinning the old grin all the same. "You drink that all the time?" he half whispered.

"All the time, like so," I said, and drank the rest of his, "and like so," and drank mine down. "Steve!" Steve already had the refills on a tray and I knew it, which is why I yelled at him. "Now about what you started to say—" and I broke off while Steve got to the table and put down the drinks and picked up the empties and went away again — "the story of your life. You sit there and tell me 'Oh, nothing,' and you say you work in a store, period. Now *I* am going to tell *you* the story of your life. First of all, I'm going to tell you who you are. You're Henry. Nobody else in God's great gray-green Universe was ever this particular Henry. We start with that. No—"

Henry said, "But I—"

"No mountain," I went on, "no

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supernova, no collapsing, alpha-spitting nucleus was ever more remarkable than the simple fact of you, Henry, just being Henry. Name me an earthquake, an oak tree, a racehorse or a Ph.D. thesis and I will, by God, name you one just like it that happened before. You," I said, leaning forward and jamming my forefinger into his collarbone, "you, Henry, are unique and unprecedented on this planet in this galaxy."

"No, I'm not," he laughed, backing off from the finger, which did him no good once I had him pinned to the wall behind him.

"No supernova," I said again, having just discovered that the phrase is a delightful way of sending the flavor of good bourbon through the nostrils. "That's what we only begin with," I went on. "Just by being, you're a miracle, aside from everything you've ever said or done or dreamed about." I took away the finger and sat back to beam at him.

"Ah," he said; I swear he blushed. "Ah, there's plenty more like me."

"Not a single one." I tipped up my glass, found it was empty already, so drank his because I had my mouth all set for it. "Steve!" I sat silently watching Henry aimlessly rubbing his collarbone while the drinks arrived and the empties left. "So we start with a miracle. Where do we go from there? How do you cap that?"

He made a sort of giggle. It meant, "I don't know."

"You never heard anybody talk like this about you before, did you?"

"No."

"All right." I put out the forefinger again, but did not touch him with it because he expected I would.

OVER his shoulder, in the wall mirror, I could see that woman sitting alone in the back booth, crying. Always a great one for crying, she was.

"I'll tell you why I talk like this, Henry," I said. "It's for your own good, because you don't know what you are. Here you walk around the place telling people 'Oh, nothing' when they ask for the story of your life, and you're a walking miracle just to start with. Now what do we go on with?"

He shrugged.

"You feel better, now you know what you are?"

"I don't . . . I never thought about it." He looked up at me swiftly, as if to find out what I wanted him to say. "I guess I do."

"All right then. That makes it better. That makes it easier on you, because I am now going to tell you what you are, Henry.

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Henry, what are you?"

"Well, you said—" he swallowed— "a miracle."

I brought down my fist with a bang that made everybody jump, even her in the mirror, but especially Henry. "*No!* I'll tell you what you are. You are a nowhere type, a *nudnick* type *nothing!*" I quickly bent forward. He shrank from the finger like a snail from salt. "And now you're going to tell me that's a paradox. You're going to say I contradicted myself."

"I'm not." His mouth trembled and then he was smiling again.

"Well, all right, but it's what you're thinking. Drink up." I raised my glass. "Here's to the eyes, blue brown and brindle, and here's to the fires that those eyes kindle; I don't mean the fires that burn down shanties, I mean the fires that pull down—"

"Gee, no, thanks," he said.

I drank my drink. "But I mean," I said aloud to myself, "really a nothing." I took his drink and held it and glared at him. "You will, by God, stop stepping on my punchlines."

"I'm sorry. I didn't even notice." He pointed vaguely. "I didn't know anyone could handle so much of that—that whiskey."

"I got news for you, boy," I said, and winked at him. "Here it is past quitting time and this whiskey is all I had for lunch, and it's what I had for a snack—high tea, wot? —and it's what I'm having for dinner, and well should you envy this mighty capacity. Among other things. Now I will show you why I have uttered no paradox in describing you as a miracle and as a simultaneous, coexistent, concurrent nothing."

I SMELLED his drink and lowered it. "You started out being everything I described—unique, unprecedented. If you thought about it at all, which I doubt, you thought of yourself as having been born naked and defenseless, and having gained constantly since—the power of speech, the ability to read, an education of sorts (you can see by my calling it that that I'm in a generous mood) and, lately, some sort of a job in some sort of a store, the right to vote, and that . . . well, unusual suit you're wearing. No matter how modest you are about these achievements—and you are, you really are—they seem to add up to more than you started with."

"Well, they don't. Since the day you were born, you've lost. What the hell is it that you keep looking at?"

"That girl. She's crying. But I'm listening to what you're saying."

"You better listen. I'm doing

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this for you, for your own good. Just let her cry. If she cries long enough, she'll find out crying doesn't help. Then she'll quit."

"You know why she's crying?"

DID I! "Yes, and it's a pretty useless procedure. Where was I?"

"I've been losing since I was born," Henry obediently reminded me.

"Yeah, yeah. What you've lost is potential, Henry. You started out with the capability of doing almost anything and you've come to a point where you can do almost nothing. On the other hand, I started out being able to do practically nothing and now I can do almost anything."

"That's wonderful!" he said warmly.

"You just don't know," I told him. "Now, mind you, we're still talking about you. You'll see the connection. I just want to illustrate a point . . . These days, everybody specializes or doesn't make it, one or the other. If you're lucky enough to have a talent and find work where you use it, you go far. If your work is outside your talent, you can still make out. If you have no talent, hard work in one single line makes for a pretty fair substitute. But in each case, how good you are depends on how closely you specialize and how hard you work inside a specialty. Me, now, I'm different. *Steve!*"

"None for me," Henry insisted plaintively.

"Do it again, Steve. Henry, stop interrupting when I'm doing you a favor. What *I* am, I'm what you might call a specializing nonspecialist. We're few and far between, Henry—guys like me, I mean. Far as work's concerned, I got a big bright red light in here—" I tapped my forehead —"that lights up if I accidentally stay in one line too long. Any time that happens, I quick wind up what I'm doing and go do something else instead. And far as talents are concerned, talents I got, I guess. Only I don't use 'em. I avoid 'em. They're the only thing that could ever trap me into specializing and I just won't be trapped, not by anybody or anything. Not me!"

"You have a real talent for writing," Henry said diffidently.

"Well, thanks, Henry, but you're wrong. Writing isn't a talent. It's a skill. Certain kinds of thinking, ways of thinking—you might call them based on talent; but writing's just a verbalization, a knack of putting into an accepted code what's already there in your head. Learning to write is like learning to type, a transformation of a sort of energy into a symbol. It's what you write that counts, not how you do it.

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What's the matter, did I lose you?"

He was looking out into the room over my shoulder and smiling. "She's still crying."

"Forget it. Every day, women lose their husbands. They get over it."

"Lose— Her husband's dead?"

"Altogether."

HE looked again and I watched his wide mouth, the show of strong, uneven teeth. I couldn't blame him. She's a very unusual-looking girl and here the coast was clear. I wondered next what you'd ever say to Henry so he wouldn't smile.

Then he was looking at me again. "You were talking about your writing," he said.

"Oh. Now suppose, Henry, you had the assignment to write a piece every week and you wrote every single one so the man who reads it believes it. And suppose one piece says: 'The world will end.' And another one says: 'The world will not end.' One says: 'No man is good. He can only struggle against his natural evil.' And another says: 'No amount of evil can alter the basic goodness of human beings.' See what I mean? Yet every single word of every piece comes out like a revelation. The whole series just stinks of truth. Would you say that you, the writer of all this crud, believes or does not believe in what he writes?"

"Well, I guess . . . I don't know. I mean I—" He looked into my eyes swiftly, trying again to discover what I wanted him to say. "Well," he said clumsily, when I just sat and wouldn't help, "if you, I mean I, writing that way, if I said white was white and then it was blue . . . well, I guess I couldn't believe 'em both?" His voice put the question mark shyly at the end and he pretended to duck.

"You mean to say that kind of writer doesn't believe anything he writes. Well, I knew you were going to say that, and you're one hundred and three per cent *wrong*." And I leaned forward and glared at him.

He looked into his lap. "I'm sorry." Then, "He believes some of it?"

"No!"

"Oh," Henry said. Miserably, he moved his glass an inch to the left: I took it away from him.

I said, "A writer like that learns to believe *everything* he writes about. Sure, white is white. But look: go down as far as you can into the microscopic, and still down, and what do you find? Measurements that can only be approximated; particles that aren't particles at all, but only places where there is the greatest probability of an electric charge . . .

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in other words, an area where nothing is fact, where nothing behaves according to the rules we set up for the proper behavior of facts.

"Now go up in the other direction, out into space, farther than our biggest telescopes can reach, and what do you find? Same thing! The incommensurable, the area of possibility and probability, where the theoretical computation (that's scientese for 'wild guess') is acceptable mathematics. So okay: all these years, we've been living as if white was white and a neat *a* plus *b* equals a respectable *c*.

"There might be an excuse for that before we knew that in the microcosm and in the macrocosm all the micrometers are made of rubber and the tape-measures are printed on wet macaroni. But we do know that now; so by what right do we assume that everything's vague up there and muzzy down yonder, but everything *here* is all neat as a pin and dusted every day? I maintain that nothing is altogether anything; that nothing proves anything, nothing follows from anything; nothing is really real, and that the idea we live in a tidy filling of a mixed-up sandwich is a delusion.

"But you can't go around not believing in reality and at the same time do your work and get your pay. So the only alternative is to believe *everything* you run into, everything you hear, and especially everything you think."

HENRY said, "But I—"

"Shut up. Now, belief—faith, if you like—is a peculiar thing. Knowledge helps it along, but at the same time it can only exist in the presence of ignorance. I hold as an axiom that complete—*really* complete—information on any given subject would destroy belief in it. It's only the gaps between the steppingstones of logic that leave room for the kind of ignorance called intuition, without which the mind can't move. So back we come to where we started: by not specializing in anything. I am guarding my ignorance, and as long as I keep that ignorance at a certain critical level, I can say anything or hear anything and believe it. So living is a lot of fun and I have more fun than anybody."

Henry smiled broadly and shook his head in deep admiration. "I'm glad if it's so, I mean, you're happy."

"What do you mean, *if*? I get what I want, Henry; I always get what I want. If that isn't being happy, what is?"

"I wouldn't know." Henry closed his eyes a moment and then said again, "I wouldn't know . . .

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Let me out, would you?"

"You going some place? I'm not through with you, Henry, me boy. I don't *begin* to be through with you."

He looked wistfully at the door and, without moving, seemed to sigh. Then he smiled again. "I just want to, uh, you know."

"Oh, that. The used beer department is down those steps over there." I got up and let him by. There was no way out of Molson's except past me; he wouldn't get away.

Why shouldn't he get away?

Because he made me feel good, that's why. There was something about Henry, a sort of hair-trigger dazzle effect, that was pretty engaging. Recite the alphabet to him and I swear he'd look dazzled. Not that the line I'd been slinging wouldn't dazzle anyone.

It was just then I decided to tell him about the murderer.

The room tilted suddenly and I hung to the edges of the table and stopped it. I recognized the sympton. Better get something to eat before soaking up any more of that sour-mash. I didn't want to get offensive.

Just then I felt, rather than heard, a sort of commotion. I looked up. Henry, that damn fool, was leaning with his palms on the table where what's-her-name sat, the one who cried all the time. I saw her glance up and then her face went all twisted. She sprang up and fetched him one across the chops that half spun him around. Next thing you know, she was through the door, with Henry staring after her and grinning and slowly rubbing his face.

"Henry!"

TURNING my way, Henry looked again at the door, then came shambling over.

"Henry, you ol' wolf, you've been holding out on me," I said. "Since when have you been chasing tomatoes?"

He just sat down heavily and fondled his cheek. "Gosh!"

"Whyn't you tell me you wanted to make a pass? I'd have saved you the trouble. She won't be good for anything for weeks yet. She can't think of anything but—"

"It wasn't anything like that. I just asked her if there was anything I could do. She didn't seem to hear me, so I asked her again. Then she got mad and hit me. That's all."

I laughed at him. "Well, you probably did her a favor. She's better off mad at something than sitting there tearing herself apart. What made you think you could get to first base with her, anyway?"

He grinned and shook his head. "I told you, honest I didn't want

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anything, only to see if I could help." He shrugged. "She was crying," he said, as if that explained something.

"So what's in it for you?"

He shook his head.

"I thought so!" I banged him on the shoulder. "That's where we'll start, Henry. We're going to make you over, that's what we're going to do. We're going to get you out of oversize second-hand shirts and undersize Boy Scouts ideas. We're going to find out what you really want and then we're going to see that you learn how to get it."

"But I'm all—I mean I don't really—"

"Shut up! And the first and rock-bottom basic and important thing you'll learn till you're blue in the face is, never do nothing for nothing. In other words, always ask 'What's in it for me?' and do nothing about anything until the answer comes up 'Plenty!' *Steve! The check!* That way you'll always have a new wallet to put in your new suit and nobody, especially girls, is going to clobber you in a filthy joint like this."

Actually it wasn't a filthy joint, but Steve came up just then and I wanted him to hear me say it. I gave him what the check said, to the penny, and told him to keep the change. Once in a while, I'd tip Steve—not often—and then I'd make it a twenty or better. What he didn't know was, if you total all the bills and all the tips, the tips came out to exactly nine per cent. Either he'd find that out for himself some day or I'd tell him; one way or the other, it would be fun. The secret of having fun is to pay attention to the details.

Out on the street, Henry stopped and shuffled his feet. "Well, good-by."

"Good-by nothing. You're coming home with me."

"Oh," he said, "I can't. I got to—"

"You got to what? Come on now, Henry—whether you know it or not, you need help; whether you like it or not, you're going to get it. Didn't I say I was going to tear you down and make you over?"

HE stepped to the right and he stepped to the left. "I can't be taking up your time. I'll just go on home."

I suddenly saw that if I couldn't change his mind, the only way I'd get him to come along would be to carry him. I could do it, but I didn't feel like it. There's always a better way than hard work.

"Henry," I said, and paused.

He waited, not quite jittering, not exactly standing still. Guys like Henry, they can't fight and

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they can't run; you can do whatever you want with them. So—think. Think of the right thing to say. I did, and I said it.

"Henry," I said, real sudden, real soft, sincere, and the change must have hit him harder than a yell, "I'm in terrible trouble and you're about the only man in the world I can trust."

"Gosh." He came a little closer and peered up at me in the thickening twilight. "Why didn't you say so?"

Sticking out the marrow of his soul, every man has an eyebolt. All you have to do is find it and drop your hook in. This was Henry's. I almost laughed, but I didn't. I turned away and sighed. "It's a long story . . . but I shouldn't bother you with it. Maybe you'd better—"

"No. Oh, no. I'll come."

"You're a pal, Henry," I whispered, and swallowed as noisily as I could.

We walked down to the park and started across it. I walked slowly and kept my eyes on the

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middle distance, like a hired mourner, while Henry trotted alongside, looking anxiously up into my face every once in a while.

"Is it about that girl?" he asked after a while.

"No," I said. "She's no trouble."

"Her husband. What happened to him?"

"Same thing that happened to the ram who didn't see the ewe turn." I hit him with my elbow. "U-turn, get it? Anyway, he drove over a cliff." We were passing under a street light at the time and I saw Henry's face. "Some day you're going to split your head plumb in two just by grinning. What do you go around showing your teeth for all the time, anyway?"

He said, "I'm sorry." And when we were almost through the park, "Why?"

"Why what?" I asked vacantly.

"The husband . . . over the cliff."

"Oh. Well, she had a sort of a roll in the hay with somebody, and when she told him, he up and knocked himself off. Some people take themselves pretty seriously. Here we are." I led him up the walk and through the herculite doors. In the elevator, he gulped around at the satinwood paneling. "This is nice."

"Keeps the rain off," I said modestly. The doors slid open and I led the way down the hall and kicked open my door. "Come on in."

IN we went and there, of course, stood Loretta with The Look on her face, the damned anger always expressed as hurt. So I pushed Henry ahead of me and watched The Look be replaced by tight Company Manners.

"My wife," I told Henry.

He stepped back and I pushed him forward again. He grinned and bobbed his head and wagged his figurative tail. "Huh-huh-huh—" he said, swallowed, and

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tried again. "Huh-how do?"

"It's Henry, my old school pal Henry that I told you about, Loretta." I'd never told her a thing. "He's hungry. I'm hungry. How's for some food?" Before she could answer, I asked, "A couple paper plates in the den would be less trouble than setting the table, hm?" and at this she must nod, so I shoved Henry toward the den and said, "Fine, and thanks, oh, best of good women," which made her nod a promise. We went in and I closed the double doors and leaned against them, laughing.

"Gosh," said Henry, his eyes heating up. "You never told me you had a—uh—were married." The smile flickered, then blazed.

"Guess I didn't. One of those things, Henry. The air you breathe, a post-nasal drip, the way you walk from here to the office — same thing. Part of the picture. Why talk about it?"

"Yes, but maybe she . . . maybe it's trouble for her. Why are you laughing?"

I was laughing because of the change in Loretta's face as we had come in. I was late and dinner was ruined, and I'd been drinking to boot; and primed as she was to parade hurt feelings all over the apartment, she hadn't expected me to bring anyone home. Ah, Loretta; so mannered, so polite! She'd have died rather than show her feelings before a stranger, and to see her change from hostility to hospitality in three point five seconds was, to me, very funny. There's always a way of getting out from under. All you have to do is think of it. In time.

"I'm laughing," I told Henry, "at the idea of Loretta's having trouble."

"You mean I'm no bother?"

"I mean you make everything all right. Sit down."

He did. "She's pretty."

"Wh—oh. Loretta. Yep, nothing but the best. Henry, I am a man different from all other men."

He fumbled with some facial expressions and came up with a slow grinning puzzlement. "Isn't everybody?" he asked timidly.

"Yes, you idiot. But by different, I mean *really* different. Not necessarily better," I added modestly. "Just different."

"How do you mean, different?" Good old Henry. What a straight man!

BY way of answering him, I took out my key-case, zipped it open, thumbed out the flat brass key of my filing drawer and dangled it. "I'll show you, soon as we have something in our stomachs and no interruptions."

"Is this the . . . the trouble

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you said you were in, you wanted my help?"

"It is, but it's so strictly private and confidential that I don't want you even thinking about it until I can lock that door and go into detail."

"Oh," he said. "All right." Visibly, he cast about for something else to talk about. "Can I ask you something about that girl who was . . . whose husband . . ."

"Fire away," I said. "Not that it matters. You have the damnedest knack, Henry, of combining the gruesome with the trivial."

"I'm sorry. She seemed so, well, sad. What was it you said, I don't think I understood it?" His voice supplied the question mark to his odd phrasing. "She and somebody . . ." His words trailed off and he went pink. "And her husband found out—"

"She sure did. And he didn't exactly find out; she *told* him. She was mixed up in some research, see. Field-test of a new drug, a so-called hypnotic. So there she was, awake and aware and absolutely subject to any and all suggestions. And as you saw for yourself, she's not a bad-looking chick, not bad at all. So nature just took its course. *Carpe diem,* as the Romans used to say, which means drill not and ye strike no oil."

He looked at me foggily, but smiling broadly, too. "The researcher, the one who gave her the drug. But that wasn't exactly her fault. I mean her husband didn't have to—"

"Her husband did have to," I mimicked, "being what he was. One of those idealistic, love-is-sacred characters, who, besides all this, was sensitive about the side of his face he left in Korea. "Love," I said, harpooning Henry's collarbone with my finger again, "is cornflakes."

I leaned back. "Besides, he had no way of knowing how it happened. This drug, it's something like sodium amytal, though chemically unrelated. You know, 'truth serum!' Only it doesn't leave the subject groggy or doped. She went straight home, walking and talking just like always, and incapable of concealing what had happened. She didn't even know she'd been—ah—medicated. It was in her coffee. All she could say was that such-and-such had happened to her and it was all so easy that, from now on, she could never know when it might happen again. He chewed on it for most of the night and then got up and got in his car and drove over the cliff."

HENRY smiled twice, one smile right on top of the other. "Now all she does is drink in bars?"

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"She doesn't drink. Ever read that William Irish book, *Phantom Lady,* Henry? There's a girl in there who cracks a character just by haunting him—by being there, wherever he is, day and night, for weeks. This chick in the bar, in her goofed-off ineffectual way, is trying to do the same thing to me. She sits where I can see her and hates me. And cries."

"*You?*"

I winked at him and made a *giddap* sort of cluck-cluck with my back teeth. "Research, Henry. A scientific project. It covers a multitude. And covering multitudes is a happy hobby, especially if you do it one by one. Sure, I know chemistry—told you I was a specializing non-specialist. Now wipe that grin off your face or you won't be able to chew: here comes the food."

Loretta carried in a tray. Butter-fried shrimp with piquant orange sauce, a mixed-greens salad with shallots and grated nuts, and an Arabian honey-cake.

"Oh!" gulped Henry, and bounced to his feet. "Oh, that's just beautiful, Mrs.—"

"You didn't bring a drink first, but I guess we can have it along with the food," I said.

"I don't want any, really," Henry.

"He's being polite. We don't let our guests be polite, do we, Lorrie?"

For a moment, she had only one lip because she had sucked in the lower one to bite on. Then she said, "I'm sorry. I'll mix—"

"Don't mix," I told her. "Bring the bottle. We wouldn't think of troubling you any more, would we, Henry?"

"I really don't want—"

"Right away, *dar*ling." Two out of five times when I say *dar*ling, I roar at her. She set the tray down on the coffee table and fairly scurried out. I laughed. "Wonderful, wonderful. She doesn't exactly hide the liquor, but she sure tidies it away. Now, by God, she'll bring it to me."

I could actually hear the soft sound at the corners of Henry's mouth as his smile stretched it.

Loretta came back and I took the bottle. "No chaser; we're *men* in here. Okay, *dar*ling, you can leave the dishes here for the night."

She wouldn't back to the door and she wouldn't—maybe she was frightened just then — she wouldn't take her eyes off me, so she got out sidewise, not forgetting to flip the crumpled fragment of a hostess's smile to Henry.

Henry was saying, "Well, thank you very much, Mrs.—" but by the time he got it all stammered out, I had the door closed.

I went to the settee, rubbing

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my hands. "Bring the bottle, Henry."

He brought it, and sat down by me, and we ate. It was very good, which is the least a man can expect. I toyed with the idea of yelling for some tabasco, but I'd had enough fun with Loretta for the time being. Enveloping that food, my stomach felt well pleased with itself. Silent, unsmiling and intent, Henry absorbed what was on his plate.

I poured a slug for Henry, knowing I could afford to be generous, and one for myself. I leaned back and enjoyed a belch, which made Henry jump, threw down the bourbon, poured another and went to the desk.

On my desk is a typewriter, and under the typewriter is a sound-absorbing mat, and in the mat I keep a sewing-machine needle, the best toothpick Man ever made. It's strong and it's sharp and it has a base you can get a grip on without snapping it. I sat in the swivel chair and leaned my elbows on the typewriter and picked my teeth and watched Henry mopping the honey off his dessert plate with a piece of bread.

"That was—your wife certainly can—"

"Like I said, Henry, nothing but the best. Sit down over here. Bring your drink."

He hesitated, then brought it over and put it on the desk where I could reach it. He sat down on the edge of the easy chair. He looked like a worrisome kitten making its first try at sitting on a fence. I laughed in his face and he smiled right back at me.

"What I'm going to do, Henry," I told him, I told average, stupid, fearful, dogface Henry, "I'm going to let you in on some things that no human being on Earth knows. I'm going to tell you at the same time that these things are known to a number of people. Not a large number, but —a number. Could both those statements be true?"

"Well, I—" he said. Then he blushed.

"You're sort of slow, so I'll keep it simple and easy for you. I just got off a paradox. But it isn't a paradox. Don't sit there and smile and shake your head at me. Just listen. You'll catch on. Now you and I—are we different from each other?"

"Oh, yes," he breathed.

"Right. At the same time, all human beings are alike. And you know what? No paradox there, either."

"No?"

"No. And here's why. You're like my wife and the bartender and my city editor and all the billions of creepers and crawlers on Earth who call themselves

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human beings. And as you just so perceptively pointed out, I'm not like you. And for your information, I'm not like Loretta or Steve or the city editor. Now do you see why there's no paradox?"

Henry shifted unhappily. He absolutely astonished me. How could a guy like that, without bluff, without deftness, without, as far as I could see, even the ability to lie a little—how could he live three consecutive days in a world like this? Look at him, worrying away at my question, wanting *so* much to get the right answer.

It came like an abject apology: "No, I don't see. No, I don't." His eyes flickered, the embarrassed heat stirring and waning. "Unless what you mean is you're not a human being." He snickered weakly and again made that odd warding-off, half-ducking motion.

LEANING back, I beamed at him. "Now isn't it a relief to know you're not so dumb, after all?"

"Is that really what you mean? You're not . . . but I thought *everybody* was a human being!" he cried pathetically.

"Don't get all churned up," I told him gently.

I leaned forward very suddenly to startle him, and I did, too. I stuck my finger in my whiskey, lifted the glass with the other hand, and drew a wet circle on the desk-top, about eight inches in diameter.

"Let's say that anywhere in this circle—" I moved the glass around inside the mark —"this glass is what you call human. When it's here or *here* or a little bit forward, it's still human; it's just not the same human—the same *kind* of human. You're different from Steve the bartender because everything he is is here, and everything you are is over on the other side, *here*. You're different because you're placed differently in the circle, but you're the same because you're both inside it. Presto—no paradox." I moved the glass far enough to empty it and set it aside and put my hand in the circle. The wet wood was bleaching slowly, which was okay; Loretta would polish it up in the morning.

"Inside this circle," I said, "a man can be smart or stupid, musical, aggressive, tall, effeminate, mechanically apt, Yugoslavian, a mathematical genius or a strudel baker—but he's still human. Now by what Earthly conceit do we conclude that a man just *has* to live within that circle? What about a guy who's born here, on the outside edge? Why can't he be here, right on the line? Who's to say he can't live way out here?" And I banged my

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hand down a foot away from the circle.

Henry said, "I—"

"Shut up. Answer: there *are* people outside this border. Not many, but some. And if you're going to call the ones inside 'human,' the ones outside have to be — something else."

"Is that what you are?" Henry whispered.

"That's me."

"Is that what they call a moot . . . mute . . ."

"Mutation? No! Well, damn it, yes; that's as good a name as any. But not in any way you ever thought of. No atom-dust, no cosmic rays, nothing like that. Just normal everyday variation. Look, you have to go farther from one side of this circle to the other than from just inside to just outside—right? Yet the distance across is within the permissable variation; the difference between human beings which leaves them still human beings together. But one small variation this way —" I slid my finger outside the circle— "and you have something quite new."

"How—new?"

I shrugged. "Any one of a zillion ways. Take any species. Take kittens from the same litter. You'll find one has sharper claws, another has sharper eyes. Which is the best kitten?"

"Well, I guess the one with the—"

"No, you mumbling Neanderthal." That made him smile. "Neither one is best. They're just different, each in a way that makes him hunt a bit better. Now say another of the litter has functional gills and another has mat-scales like an armadillo. there's your . . ."

"Supercat?" he beamed.

"Just call it 'uncat.' "

"You—you're, uh, un—"

"Unhuman." I nodded.

"But you look—"

"Yeah, a cat with sweat-glands in its skin would look like a cat, too—most of the time. I'm different, Henry. I've always known I was different." I poked my finger toward him and he curled from its imaginary touch. "You, for example—you have, like nobody else I ever met, that stuff called 'empathy.' "

"I have?"

"You're always feeling with other people's fingertips, seeing through other people's eyes. Laugh with 'em, cry with 'em. Empathy."

"Oh. Yes, I guess—"

"Now me, I have as much of that as my armadillo-cat has fur. It's just not in me. I have other things instead. Do you know I was never angry in my life? That's why I have so much fun. That's why I can push people

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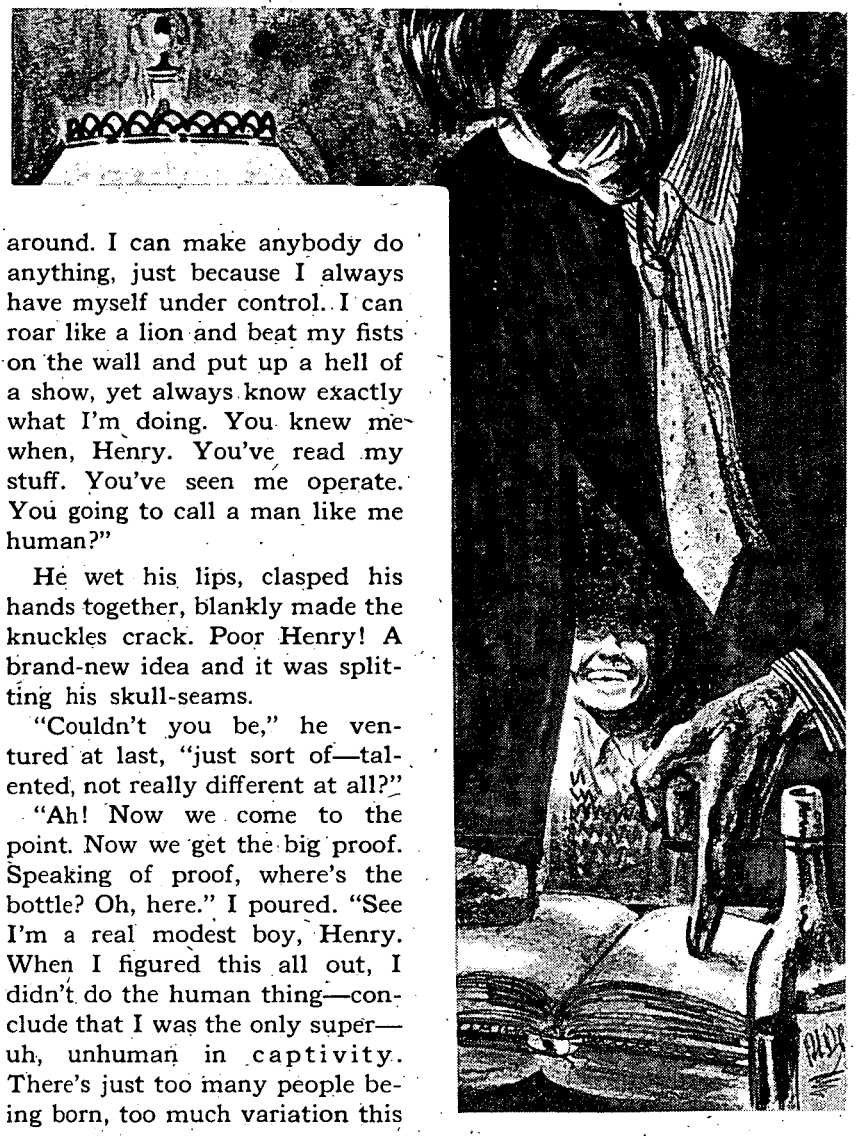

around. I can make anybody do anything, just because I always have myself under control. I can roar like a lion and beat my fists on the wall and put up a hell of a show, yet always know exactly what I'm doing. You knew me when, Henry. You've read my stuff. You've seen me operate. You going to call a man like me human?"

He wet his lips, clasped his hands together, blankly made the knuckles crack. Poor Henry! A brand-new idea and it was splitting his skull-seams.

"Couldn't you be," he ventured at last, "just sort of—talented, not really different at all?"

"Ah! Now we come to the point. Now we get the big proof. Speaking of proof, where's the bottle? Oh, here." I poured. "See I'm a real modest boy, Henry. When I figured this all out, I didn't do the human thing—conclude that I was the only super—uh, unhuman in captivity. There's just too many people being born, too much variation this

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way and that. Law of averages. There just *has* to be more like me."

"You mean just like—"

"No! I mean more unhumans—all kinds, any kind. So, because I can think like an unhuman, I thought my way after others of my kind."

TRYING to heave up out of my chair, I quit and slumped back. "Damn it. You know, I'm hungry as a . . . Imagine, a dinner like that. Why can't she cook up something that sticks to a man's ribs? I swear I'm as empty as a paper sack. Henry, check that door for me, see that it's locked."

He went to the door and tried it. It was locked. As he came back, I picked up the brass key. "This will open your eyes, Henry, old boy, old boy," I said.

I unlocked the file drawer. It got heavier all the time, I thought. Well, if you're going to have fun, you've got to take care of the details.

I lifted out the "Justice" file and banged it down beside the typewriter. "So I found me another unhuman. Takes one to catch one. Just you listen now and tell me what human being would even start this line of thinking, let alone carry it through." I opened the file.

"This all started," I said, "when I did a piece on unsolved murders. You know that no city releases figures on unsolved murders; well, not easily, anyway. You should see 'em—69 per cent in one city, 73 in another. Some bring it down to 40—our town got it to 38 per cent one year. But that's a whole lot of scot-free murderers, hm? All over the country. Imagine!

"So what I did—for the feature story, you know—I dug up everything I could find on a whole drawerful of these cases. What I wanted was an angle. What's the most obvious? Whodunit, that's what. So throw that out. What next? Who could have done it, but didn't. Throw that out, too.

"So then it occurred to me to see if there wasn't some sort of lowest common denominator to them—here a second-string advertising man with no enemies, there a teen-age hood with a knife in him, yonder a rich boy found floating next to his yacht—all kinds of people get murdered, you know.

"Mind you, I'm still just looking for an angle.

"Next, I threw out all the cases where people had a lot of enemies, and all the cases where a lot of people had an opportunity as well as a motive. This left a pretty strange stack. All of them were, apparently, reasonless, pur-

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poseless murders, all done differently at different places.

"Well, I phoned and I legged and I sat and thought, and I interviewed God knows how many people. Couple of times, I came pretty close to finding new stuff, too, but who cares whodunit? Not me. I wasn't looking for crimes with a reason behind them. I was looking for killings with no motive. Any time the scent got hot, I threw that case out. By this time, I had a feature shaping up—I'd call it 'Murder for What?' Good for a couple spreads—maybe even a series."

I thumped the file. "I guess I had the answer for weeks before I even knew it. Then, one night, I sat here and read everything through. And what do you know: in each and every one of these cases, someone was happy because of the murder! Or, anyway, happier. And I'm *not* talking about people who inherited the victims' loot, or poor persecuted wives and children who would no longer have to put up with the old man's payday drunks. Reach me the bottle, Henry.

"Now not a single one of this final stack showed motive or opportunity for the — let's say 'beneficiary' of these murders. Like this one, where the old woman, her with a constitution like a buffalo, she'd been lying in bed for eight months pretending to be sick so her daughter wouldn't marry. The girl was nine miles away when someone cut the old biddy's throat.

"And this one here, an engineering student and a good one, working his own way through school and then had to quit and come home because his old man had doubled the size of the ancestral hardware store for no reason but that it had been small enough to handle by himself. So one warm Sunday, the kid is, no fooling, in church in front of eighty witnesses while, down the road, somebody parts the old man's head with a tire iron. They never did find out who.

"And this one, this is practically the best of all: a little old guy for years ran a flea circus, gluing costumes on 'em and making 'em turn little merry-go-rounds and all that kind of thing. Used to feed 'em off his arm. One fine day, someone swipes one of his pets and replaces it with *pulex cheopis*—a rat flea, to you—loaded to the eyeballs, or cephalothorax, as the case may be, with bubonic plague. First and only case of black plague in these parts in a hundred and eighty years." I laughed.

"Someone was happier?" Henry asked wonderingly.

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"Well, the other fleas were. And besides, the old guy used to get a large charge out of cracking fleas in his tweezers right under the noses of the most squeamish women in the audience. You know how they go—*blip!*"

HENRY grinned. "Blip," he half-whispered.

"It's hot in here," I said uncomfortably. "Well, this is the part I was getting to, I mean about thinking unhumanly. I said to myself, now suppose, just for the sake of argument, that there's this guy, see, a sort of mutant, a slight variation to just outside the circle, and he has this special way of thinking; he goes around killing people who stand in other people's way. He never kills the same way or the same kind of person or in the same place. So how could anyone ever catch up with him?

"Right away, I began looking into other deaths—the 'natural causes' ones. Why? Well, here, whoever he is, he might do some murders that look like murders, but he'd also do some that looked like natural causes; he'd have to; there's only just so many ways you can kill people and this busy, busy boy would have to try all of 'em. So I smelled around looking not for a killer, but for happy people, innocent people, who had benefited from these deaths.

"Whenever I found a situation like that, I checked back on the death. Sometimes it was a perfectly genuine croak, but time and again I found what you might find if you knew what you were looking for . . . scarlet fever, for instance. People shouldn't die of scarlet fever, but you know what? Feed somebody just enough belladonna and a doctor will write a scarlet fever certificate for the late lamented, nice as you please, if he has no reason to be suspicious. And in these deaths—my busy boy's work, I mean—there's never any reason to be suspicious. Where's the—you pour it for once, Henry.

"Hey, Henry! I'm getting tighter'n a ticklish tick with a alum stick, haha . . .

"'Course, by this time, the feature story was up the spout; I had better use for the situation than a lousy feature or even a series. Yep. For weeks now, I've been following the meatwagons and morguing around. All I do, I write 'em up when they look funny to me. I keep it to myself; it's all in the files here, every one of 'em. Oh, man, if the papers or the coroner or somebody got hold of those files, what a *hassle!* They'd dig up the marble orchards around here like potato patches! They'd find more little old embolisms and post-syncopes!

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"Say, did you know that *Aconitium Napellus,* which is wolfsbane, which is aconite, has a root that grates up into a specially nippy kind of horseradish for them as likes it strong for a few brief seconds? There's a woman just down the street who curled up and died last Tuesday and they called it heart failure; her daughter's already headed for Hollywood where she won't make anything but carhop, second class, but anyway it's what she wanted.

"Sooner or later, taking the notes I do the way I do at the deaths I investigate, this boy, this busy, busy fellow who is bringing so much sunshine into so many brutalized innocent lives, this boy will come over to me and say, 'Hi, chum, you looking for somebody?' "

"WHAT will you do," gasped Henry without the question mark.

"What do you think?" I prodded.

"A reward, maybe? Or a big scoop—is that what they call it in newspapers?"

"Yes, in the movies. *Catch it, Hen*—hey, thanks. First time I knocked over a bottle in nine years, so help me. Mop up the ol' 'Justice' file—I call it the 'Justice' file; you like that, boy? Ooo . . . ooh. I'm adrift, kid, and you know what? I love it. Pour me another. Do it m'self only I'm not myself if you see what I mmm. Good.

"So where was I? Oh, yes, you say I'd nab this busy boy and get a reward. Well, there you go thinking like a human being. I, sir Henry, will do no such a thing. Now I don't know exactly why this boy does this bit and I don't much care, long's I can get him to do it for me. He wants to knock off obstacles from the path of poor imprisoned souls, I got just the chore for him. Just some justice is all.

"You see that scared rabbit came in here a while back with the tray, that Loretta? Now that thing with Loretta, it was great while it lasted, and it lasted too long about four months back. All the time around, oh, please don't drink so much, where have you been, but I was worried . . . you know the routine, Henry. Now I could handle this myself, but even I can't think of a way which wouldn't be either expensive or messy.

"When you come right down to it, I'd just as soon keep her around.

"Loretta's not much trouble. She leaves me alone pretty much and comes in here about the time I'm bottle dippy every night and gets me into bed, talking on bright and cheery as anything, just as if

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I wasn't hooked over the desk here, green as a gherkin and just as pickled . . .

"The reason, the *real* reason I'd like to introduce this other unhuman type to my lovely wife is that I'd get more of a kick than you'd understand, just making him do it. Humans I can handle; this boy would be a real challenge. You can talk anybody into anything, and yourself out of anything, if you can just think of the right thing to say—and I'm the boy who can do it. Was your mother frightened by a keyboard?"

"What?" he asked, startled.

"That grin. What I'd like to know, I'd like to know how that busy boy covers so much territory. First he has to find 'em, then he has to plan how to knock 'em off, then he has to wait his chance . . . so *many,* Henny! Five already this week and here it's only Thursday!"

"Maybe there's more than one," Henry suggested tentatively.

"SAY, I never thought of that!" I exclaimed. "I guess it's because there's only one of me. Gosh, what a lovely idea—squads of unhumans thinking unhumanly, doing whatever they unhumanly want all over the lot. But why should the likes of him or them take chances just to make some humans happy?"

"They don't care if anyone gets happy," said Henry. "Why are you whispering?"

"Must be getting pretty tight, I guess; can't seem to do much better. Whee-ooo! Such a gorgeous load! *What?* What's that you said about the unhumans, that they don't care about making people happy? Listen, son, don't go telling me about unhumans. Who's the expert around here? I tell you, every time they knock somebody off, someone around stops getting mistreated. Those files there—"

"Right files, wrong conclusion. You keep worrying about what you are; we don't. We just *are.*"

"*We?* Are you classifying yourself with *me?*"

"I wasn't," said Henry, not smiling. "Just what you are, human or not, I don't know and I don't care. You're a blowhard, though."

I snarled and heaved myself upward. But a whispered snarl doesn't amount to much and you can heave all you like and get nowhere when your arms are deadwood and your legs are about as responsive as those old inner tubes in your neighbor's back yard.

"What's the matter with me?" I rasped.

"You're about nine-tenths dead, that's all."

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"Nine—what do you mean, Henry? What are you talking about? I'm just drunk, not—"

"Dicoumarin," he said. "You know what that is?"

"Sure I know what it is. Capillary poison. All the smallest blood vessels rupture and you bleed to death internally before you even know you're sick. Henry, you've poisoned *me!*"

"Well, yes."

I tried to struggle up, but I couldn't. "You weren't supposed to kill *me,* Henry! It was Loretta! That's why I brought you home—I guessed that the killer would be the opposite of the likes of me and you're about as opposite as anybody could be. And you know I can't stand her and killing her would make me happier. It's *her* you're supposed to kill, Henry!"

"No," he answered stubbornly. "It couldn't be her. I told you we don't care if somebody's made happier. It had to be you."

"Why? *Why?*"

"To stop the noise."

I looked at him, frowned foggily, shook my head.

"Self-defense," he explained patiently. "I'm a—I suppose you'd call it a telepath, though it isn't telepathy like you read about. No words, no pictures. Just a *noise,* I guess is the best word. There's a certain kind of mind—human or not, who cares?—it can't get angry, and it enjoys degrading other people and humiliating them, and when it's enjoying these things, it sets up . . . that noise. We can't stand the noise. You—you're special. Hear you for miles. When we get rid of one of you, of course it makes a human happy—whoever it was you were humiliating." Then he said again, "We can't stand the noise."

I whispered, "Help me, Henry. Whatever it is, I'll stop. I promise I'll stop."

"You can't stop," he said. "Not while you're alive . . . Oh, damn you, damn you, you're even enjoying dying!" He put forearms over his head—not over his ears—and rocked back and forth, and smiled and smiled.

"You smile all the time," I hissed. "Even now. *You* enjoy *killing.*"

"It isn't a smile and I kill only to stop the noise." He was breathing hard. "How can I explain to anything like you? The noise—it's—some people can't stand the screek of a fingernail on a blackboard, some hate the scrape of a shovel on a cement sidewalk, most can't take the rasp of a file on metal."

"They don't bother me a bit," I said.

"Here, damn you, look here!" He snatched my sewing-machine

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needle and plunged it under his thumbnail. His lips spread wider. "It's *pain* . . . *pain!* Only, with you, it's agony! I can't stand your noise! It puts all my teeth on edge, it hurts my head, it deafens me!"

I remembered all the times he had smiled since I brought him home. And each time like the nail on the blackboard, like the shovel, like the rasp of the file, like the needle under the nail . . .

I made a sort of laugh. "You'll come with me. They'll find the poison in me."

"Dicoumarin? You know better than that. And there won't be any in the whiskey glass, if that's what you're thinking. I gave it to you three hours ago, in Molson's, in the drink I didn't want and you took."

"I'll hang on and tell Lorrie."

"Tell me," he jeered, leaning toward me, his smile that wasn't a smile as huge as a boa's about to bite.

My tongue was thick, numb and wobbly. "Don't!" I gasped. "Don't . . . jump me . . . now, Henry."

AGAIN he clutched his head. "Get mad! If you could get mad, it would go away, that noise! Argh, you snakes, you freaks . . . all of you who enjoy hating! The girl, remember her, in the bar? She was making that noise until I got her angry . . . she's going to get better now that you're dead."

I was going to say I wasn't dead, I wasn't yet, but my mouth wouldn't work.

"I'll take these," Henry said. I watched him stack the files right under my nose. "Everything's nice and tidy," he told me. "You were due to drink yourself to death, anyway, and here you are just like always. Only you won't sleep this one off . . . I wish I could have got you sore."

I watched him unlock the door, saw him go, heard him talking to Lorrie briefly. Then the outer door banged.

LORETTA came into the room and stopped. She sighed. "Oh, dear, we're in a *special* mess tonight, aren't we?" she said brightly.

I tried, how I tried to yell, to scream at her, but I couldn't, and it was growing dark.

Loretta bent and pulled my arm around her neck. "You'll have to help just a little now. *Up*sy-daisy!" Strong shoulders and a practiced hip hauled me upright, lolling. "You know, I do like your friend Henry. The way he smiled when he left—why, it made me feel that everything's going to be all right."

—THEODORE STURGEON

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BRKNK'S BOUNTY

By

JERRY SOHL

From a feature writer to feature attraction—now there's a real booze-to-riches success story!

Illustrated by KOSSIN

I NEVER thought I'd like circus life, but a year of it has changed me. It's in my blood now and I suppose I'll never give it up—even if they'd let me.

This job is better than anything I could get in the newspaper racket. I work all summer, it's true, but I get the winter off, though some of the offers for winter work are mighty tempting. Maybe if I hadn't been kicked off the paper, I'd be city editor now, knocking my brains out. Who knows? But maybe I'd just be a rewrite man, or in the slot, writing heads, or copyreading. But the thought of newspaper work after all this appalls me.

Trlk, the Sybillian, should be thanked for the whole thing, I suppose, though it would be a grudging thank-you I'd give him, considering all the trouble he caused. Still . . .

I first saw him on a July morning at the beginning of the vacation schedule, when four of us on the local side were trying to do five people's work.

My first inkling anything was wrong came when I returned from the courthouse beat and stuck a sheet of paper in the typewriter to write the probate court notes.

I struck the keys. They wouldn't

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go all the way down. I opened the cover plate, looked in to see what was wrong. I saw nothing, so I tried again. Oscar Phipps, the city editor, was giving me the eye. I figured maybe he was pulling a trick on me. But then I knew *he* hadn't. He wasn't the type.

THE back space, tabular, margin release, shift and shift lock worked perfectly. But the keys only went down a short way before they stopped. All except one key. The cap *D*.

I hit the *D*. It worked fine the first time, but not the second. I tried all the keys again. This time only the *i* worked. Now I had *Di*. I went ahead testing. Pretty soon I had

Dimly

Then came a space. A few letters more and it was

Dimly drouse the dreary droves

Phipps had one eyebrow raised. I lifted the cover plate again. Quickly.

There I saw a fuzzy thing. It whisked out of sight. I snapped the plate down and held it down. The party I had been on the night before hadn't been that good and I had had at least three hours' sleep.

I tried typing again. I got nothing until I started a new line. Then out came

Primly prides the privy prose

I banged up the plate, saw a blur of something slinking down between the type bar levers again. Whatever it was, it managed to squeeze itself out of sight in a most amazing way.

"Hey!" I said. "I know you're down there. What's the big idea?"

Fuzzy squeezed his head up from the levers. The head looked like that of a mouse, but it had teeth like a chipmunk and bright little black beads for eyes. They looked right at me.

"You go right ahead," he said in a shrill voice. "This is going to be a great poem. Did you get all that alliteration there in those two lines?".

"Listen, will you get out of there? I've got work to do!"

"Yes, I think I've hit it at last. It was that four-stress iambic that did it. It *was* iambic, wasn't it?"

"Go away," I said miserably.

Fuzzy pulled the rest of himself out of the bars and stood on hind feet. He crossed his forepaws in front of him, vibrated his long, furry tail, and said defiantly, "No."

"Look," I pleaded, "I'm not Don Marquis and you're not Archie and I have work to do. Now will you *please* get out of this typewriter?"

His tiny ears swiveled upward. "Who's Don Marquis? And Archie?"

"Go to hell," I said. I slammed

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the cover down and looked up into the cold eyes of Oscar Phipps who was standing next to my desk.

"Who, may I ask," he said ominously, "do you think you're talking to?"

"Take a look." I lifted the plate once again. Fuzzy was there on his back, his legs crossed, his tail twitching.

"I don't see anything," Phipps said.

"You mean you can't see Fuzzy here?" I pointed to him, the end of my finger an inch from his head. "Ouch!" I drew my hand away. "The little devil bit me."

"You're fired, Mr. Weaver," Phipps said in a tired voice. "Fired as of right now. I'll arrange for two weeks' severance pay. And my advice to you is to stay off the bottle or see a psychiatrist—or both. Not that it'll do you any good. You never amounted to anything and you never will."

I would have taken a swipe at Fuzzy, but he had slunk out of sight.

DURING the two erratic years I had been on the newspaper, I had passed the city park every morning on my way to work, feeling an envy for those who had nothing better to do than sit on the benches and contemplate the nature of the Universe. Now I took myself there and sat as I had seen others do, hoping to feel a kinship with these unfortunates.

But all I did was feel alone, frustrated and angry at Phipps. Maybe I had been too convivial, maybe I had enjoyed night life too much, maybe I hadn't given the paper my all. But I wasn't ready for the booby hatch even if I had seen a fuzzy little thing that could talk.

I drew a copy of *Editor and Publisher* from my pocket and was scanning the "Help Wanted: Editorial" columns when out of the corner of my eye I saw a blob of black moving along the walk.

Turning handsprings, balancing himself precariously on the end of his vibrating tail, running and waving his forepaws to get my attention was Fuzzy.

I groaned. "Please go away!" I covered my eyes so I wouldn't have to look at him.

"Why?" he piped.

"Because you're a hallucination."

"I'm not a hallucination," he said indignantly. "I'm real flesh and blood. See?" He vibrated his tail so fast, I could hardly see it. Then it stopped and stood straight out. "Lovely, isn't it?"

"Look," I said, leaning far off the bench to speak to him, "I can prove you're a hallucination."

"You *can*?" he quavered. "How?"

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"Because Phipps couldn't see you."

"That square? Hah! He would not have believed it if he had seen me."

"You mean you—"

He disappeared and reappeared like a flashing neon sign. "There!" he said triumphantly.

"Why didn't you let him see you then?" I asked, a little angry, but pleased nonetheless with his opinion of Phipps. "Because you didn't, you cost me my job."

HE waved a forepaw deprecatingly. "You didn't want to stay on that hick sheet anyway."

"It was a job."

"Now you've got a better one."

"Who's kidding whom?"

"Together we'll write real literature."

"I don't know anything about literature. My job is writing the news."

"You'll be famous. With my help, of course."

"Not with that 'dimly drouse' stuff."

"Oh, that!"

"Where did you come from, Fuzzy?"

"Do I ask you where you come from?"

"Well, no—"

"And my name's not Fuzzy. It's Trlk, pronounced Turlick and spelled T-r-l-k."

"My name's Larry Weaver, pronounced Lar-ree—"

"I know. Look, you got a typewriter?"

"A portable. At the apartment."

"That will do."

"Aren't you taking things for granted? I haven't said yet whether I liked the idea."

"Do you have any choice?"

I looked at him, a couple of ounces of harmless-looking fur that had already cost me my immediate future in the newspaper business.

"I guess not," I said, hoping I could find a way to get rid of him if things didn't work out right.

And so began a strange collaboration, with Trlk perched on my shoulder dictating stories into my ear while I typed them. He had definite ideas about writing and I let him have his way. After all, I didn't know anything about literature.

Sometimes, when he'd get stuck, he'd get down and pace the living room rug. Other times he'd massage his tail, which was as long as he, smoothing it with his tongue and meticulously arranging every hair on it.

"It's lovely, don't you think?" he often asked.

And I'd say, "If you spent as much time working on this story as you do admiring your tail, we'd get something done."

"Sorry," he'd say, hopping on

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my shoulder again. "Where were we?"

I'd read the last page and we'd be off again.

ONE day, Trlk crawled on a shelf to watch me shave, whiffed the shaving lotion bottle, became excited and demanded I put a drop of it in front of him. He lapped it up, sank blissfully back on his tail and sighed.

"Wonnerful," he squeaked. "Shimply wonnerful." He hiccupped.

I let him sleep it off, but was always careful with the lotion after that.

Days stretched into weeks, my money was running low and the apartment superintendent was pressing me for payment of the month's rent. I kept telling him I'd pay as soon as the first checks came in.

But only rejection slips came. First one, then two, then half a dozen.

"They don't even read them!" Trlk wailed.

"Of course they read them," I said. I showed him the sheets. They were wrinkled from handling.

"The post office did that," he countered.

I showed him coffee spots on one page, cigarette burns on another.

"Well, maybe—" he said, but I don't think anything would have convinced him.

When the last story came back, Trlk was so depressed, I felt sorrier for him than I did for myself.

It was time. We had been working hard. I got out a bottle.

I poured a little lotion for Trlk.

The next afternoon, we tackled the problem in earnest. We went to the library, got a book on writing and took it home. After reading it from cover to cover, I said, "Trlk, I think I've found the trouble with your stories."

"What is it?"

"You don't write about things you know, things that happened to you, that you have observed." I showed him where it advised this in the book.

His eyes brightened. We went right to work.

This time the stories glowed, but so did my cheeks. The narratives all involved a man who lived in a hotel room. They recounted the seemingly endless love affairs with his female visitors.

"Why, Trlk!" I exclaimed. "How come you know about things like this?"

HE confessed he had lived with such a man, a free-lance writer who never made the grade with his writing, but who had plenty of girl friends who paid the freight.

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"He had a way with women," Trlk explained.

"He certainly had," I said, reading again the last page he had dictated.

"He finally married an older woman with money. Then he gave up trying to write."

"I don't blame him," I said wistfully.

"I had to find another writer. This time I decided to try a newspaper. That's where I ran into you."

"Don't remind me."

Things got better after that. We began to get a few checks from magazines. They were small checks, but they paid a few bills.

The big blow fell, however, when Mr. Aldenrood, the superintendent, came roaring upstairs one day clutching a sheaf of papers.

"This stuff!" he screamed, waving the sheets before me. "The kids found it in the waste paper. They're selling them a dime a sheet around the neighborhood."

"They're worth more than that," I said, regretting that Trlk and I hadn't burned our rough drafts.

"You're going to move," Mr. Aldenrood said, "at the earliest possible instant." His face was apoplectic. "I'm giving you notice right now—thirty days!" He turned and went out, muttering, "The idea of anybody committing to paper—" and slammed the door.

Two days later, I was seated at the typewriter, smoking a cigarette and waiting for Trlk as he paced back and forth on the rug, tiny paws clasped behind his back, talking to himself and working out a story angle at the same time, when suddenly there appeared on the carpet next to him a whole host of creatures just like him.

I nearly gulped down my cigarette.

Trlk let out a high-pitched screech of joy and ran over to them. They wound their long tails around each other, clasped and unclasped them, twined them together. It seemed a sort of greeting. Meanwhile, they kept up a jabber that sounded like a 33⅓ rpm record being played 78 rpm.

Finally, the biggest one detached himself from the group and gave Trlk a tongue-lashing that would have done justice to a Phipps. Trlk hung his head. Every time he tried to say something, the big one would start in again.

AT length the leader turned to me. "My name is Brknk, pronounced b u r k - n e c k and spelled b-r-k-n-k."

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"And I'm Larry Weaver," I said, hoping they weren't relatives who were going to stay. "That's pronounced Lar-ree—"

"I know. We're from Sybilla III. Tourists. We include Earth in our itinerary. It has some of the quaintest customs of all the inhabited planets we visit. We're terribly sorry for all the inconveniences our wayward Trlk here has caused you."

"It was nothing," I said with a lightness I didn't feel.

"Trlk had threatened to run off many times. He has a craze for self-expression and your literature fascinates him. He has an insatiable thirst—"

"I know."

HE turned to Trlk. "It's against the rules of the Galactic Tours to make yourself visible to any of the inhabitants along the way. You know that. And it's a prime offense to interfere with their lives. Do you realize how many rules you have broken, how long we have been looking for you?"

"He did the best he could," I said hopefully. "As a matter of fact, we were having considerable success with his—a literary project."

"I understand you lost your job because of him. Is that right?"

"Yes, but I encouraged him." I hoped there was some way I could ease the sentence.

"Trlk has committed grievous wrongs, Mr. Weaver. We must make it up to you."

"Oh?" Here was an angle I hadn't expected.

"What can we do for you?"

I considered a moment. "You mean a wish or something?"

Brknk laughed. "Nothing like that. We're not magicians."

"Well, I could stand a little cash."

"I'm sorry," he said, and did look pained. "We can't interfere in business. We don't have any of your currency and we are forbidden to duplicate or steal it."

He frowned and studied me. Suddenly his face brightened. He bawled orders and several smaller Sybillians rushed forward and started scampering all over me. One of them nipped a piece of flesh out of my arm.

"Ouch!" I yelped, rubbing the spot. "What are you doing?"

"You humans are a proud race," Brknk explained. "I'll give you reason to be prouder than the rest. We'll change your metabolism, your endocrine balance, toughen your muscle fibers a thousandfold. We'll make you the strongest man on Earth!"

"Look," I said, "I don't want to be the strongest man on Earth."

"Well, how about the world's champion boxer? We can speed

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up your reflexes at least ten times."

I shook my head. "I don't want that, either. Sounds too much like work. Besides, I never liked getting into fights."

BRKNK scowled, called a huddle. They buzzed at each other, their tails vibrating like mad. One of them finally yipped and everybody spun around.

Brknk beamed. "We've got it!"

"What is it?"

A little Sybillian I hadn't noticed jabbed something in my arm. I winced and he nearly fell off. He retreated with injured pride.

"Come along, Trlk," Brknk said.

"What's supposed to happen?" I asked.

"It will be a glorious surprise," Brknk assured me. "You'll never regret it. The only thing I ask is that you never tell anyone about us."

I promised.

Trlk looked up at me. I noticed the beginning of tears in his eyes. I reached down and patted him gently on the head.

"So long, little fellow," I said. "It's been fun."

"Good-by," he said sorrowfully.

They vanished.

Nothing happened for several days, so I bought a copy of *Editor and Publisher* and was writing for my first job when I felt a tender spot on my tail bone. When I examined it, I saw a protuberance there.

There was no denying it. The Sybillians had given me what they treasured most.

I was growing a tail—a long, hairy tail.

As I say, I have come to like circus life.

At first I tried to get doctors to cut it off, but they were too curious for that. Then I thought of jumping in the river or putting a bullet through my head.

But after I saw what the scientists were making of it, when I viewed my picture in all the papers, and when I saw the awe with which I was regarded by everyone, I changed my mind.

Now I make a cool twenty-five thousand a year without lifting a finger.

Just my tail.

I've become rather fond of it. I've even learned how to vibrate it.

But I've never told anyone about the Sybillians. They wouldn't believe it.

Not old Phipps, anyway.

Some day I'll go and vibrate my tail right in his face. I'd never amount to anything, eh? Let's see *him* grow a tail!

—JERRY SOHL

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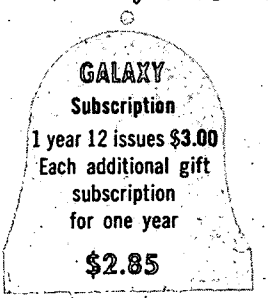

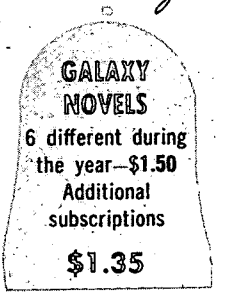

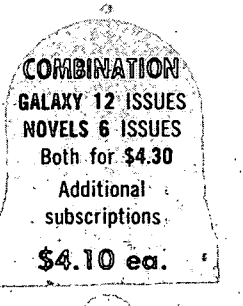

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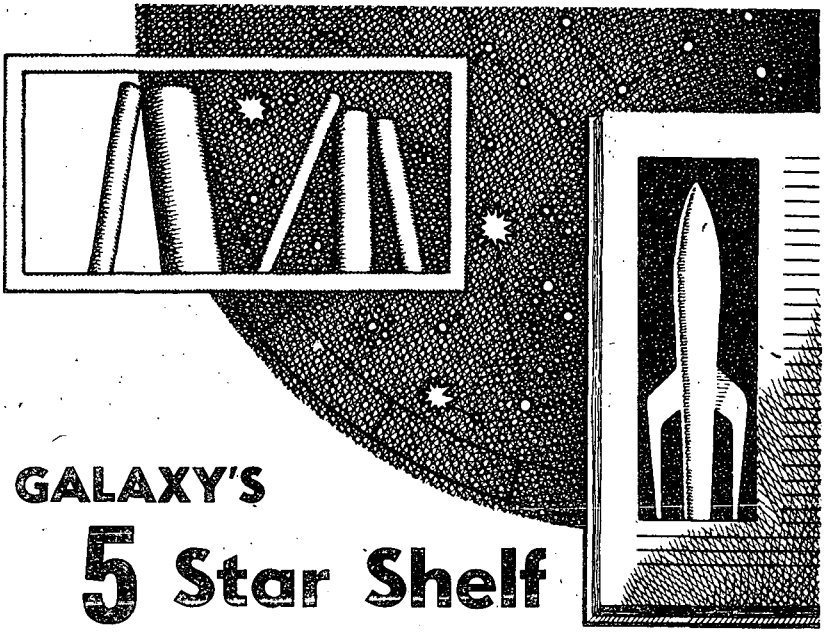

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

STORIES FOR TOMORROW, edited by William Sloane. Funk and Wagnalls Co., $3.95

THIS is the fattest anthology in years—636 pages—and a very useful one for people new to science fiction. Addicts may object to the fact that 15 out of the 29 tales have been included in other books, but they are all superb items. Of the 14 unanthologized stories, 6 at least are disappointing; but on the whole it is a rich and varied job, edited with real individuality.

There are two stories each by Bradbury, Clarke, Jones, Blish, Neville and Simak, and none by Sturgeon, Kuttner, Leiber, van Vogt, and several others of the Famed: an indication of the very personal nature of the editor's approach to science fiction, which does make the book something less than a representative cross-section of the field.

Sloane's introduction and story notes are excellent, and his ideas about science fiction in general are worth attention.

Nice job.

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THE FORGOTTEN PLANET by Murray Leinster. Gnome Press, $2.50

IT'S a pleasure to have these three novelets (two very old and one recent) brought out in an attractive hardbound format. The book, too, is a genuine novel, not just three tales loosely jointed together. It is based on Leinster's 1926 and 1927 *Amazing Stories* adventures, "The Mad Planet" and "Red Dust," and on "Nightmare planet," from *Science Fiction Plus* in 1953.

The three have been effectively rewritten into a narrative of the struggles of a few humans who have reverted to savagery on a planet where monster insects and poisonous fungi are the predominant forms of life. It tells how a primitive genius among the savages finally brings his people back to the status of civilized beings.

One may object to the unnecessarily pat coincidence that winds up the story, since it is in no way essential to the plot, but, outside of that, there is almost nothing in the story that is not first rate.

It is Leinster at his exciting, skilled best.

IDEAS AND OPINIONS by Albert Einstein. Crown Publishers, Inc., $4.00

HOW easy it is for the layman to forget what a supernal scientific genius the world has in Albert Einstein! He is an old man; his greatest discoveries were made half a century ago; his current work is so abstruse that it is beyond most of us; and his unflinching defense of freedom of inquiry sometimes overshadow his work as a mathematical physicist.

Nevertheless, he is still, first and foremost, the greatest scientist of our time; and this book proves it. Over 150 of its 375 pages are given over to his own popularizations of his scientific discoveries and they are magnificent pages.

For any reader who tends to accept Einstein concepts as matters of mere machinery in modern science fiction, as unexplained techniques for moving a story forward, their "inventor's" own descriptions of their possibilities (and limitations) are essential reading.

The other 225 pages in the book are equally fascinating, with their wealth of ideas about our modern society and its problems, and their unself-conscious portrait of a man who detests bigotry of every sort, social and political as well as scientific.

Even for those who have the author's two previous collections of essays in English, the present

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book is valuable, for it includes many pieces he has written since 1950, as well as a rich selection from the first two volumes.

THE EXPLORERS by C. M. Kornbluth. Ballantine Books, 35c

IF you are like me in my admiration for Cyril Kornbluth, the news that this collection of 9 of his tales contains one A-plus item never before published anywhere will make you go out and buy it at once.

"Gomez" is the story of a "natural" scientist, a Latin who is first seen as a dishwasher in the Porto Bello Lunchroom, in New York City. He is Kornbluth's fictional parallel to Srinivasa Ramanujan, a very real instinctive mathematician who died in 1920. The story has everything, including a strong plea for freedom of science.

Most of the other 8 stories are nearly as good. Four have appeared in general anthologies, the rest in magazines. Among the latter, "The Rocket of 1955" and "The Goodly Creatures" are particularly outstanding. Indeed, Kornbluth's first short story collection is a distinguished one throughout.

I AM LEGEND by Richard Matheson. Gold Medal Books, 25c

FOR what I think is Gold Medal's first venture into the field of original science fantasies, it has chosen a weird and, I fear, rather slow-moving first novel by a man heretofore known for his excellent short horror tales.

I Am Legend tells of a disease that almost completely wipes out the human race, leaving behind only a handful of hideously changed creatures to attempt to revive civilization.

It is "supernatural" science fiction, a horrid, violent, sometimes exciting but too often overdone tour de force.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION SHORT NOVELS, edited by Frederik Pohl. Ballantine Books, $2.00 *hardbound,* 35c *paper*

WHAT an odd and wildly off-trail little book this is! It is definitely *not* for the prosaic-minded, the gadget-lover, the believer in sober scientific extrapolation. Its three novelets are for the imaginative reader only.

The book opens with a not-too-successful tale, "Little Men," by Jessamyn West, a novelist not heretofore known for science fantasy. It suffers because Miss West does not understand that in science fiction some explanation or rationale is necessary, and because it is really only a sketch rather than a finished work.

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Nevertheless, it is a fine anti-war tale, ironically told in angry retrospect by an Army captain whose whole career had vanished when the unexplained catastrophe took place—most adults suddenly became the size of small children while most children became the size of adults.

Naturally, the children took over; unnaturally, they carry out (in a thoroughly unchildlike way) the development of a society based on the logic of their own premises: war is bad because it hurts people; sex is dandy because it is fun; etc.

Though the idea of the tale is first rate, its development leaves you dissatisfied and wanting a more convincing and less fragmentary handling.

Novelet No. 2 is Lester del Rey's theological shocker, "For I Am a Jealous People." It deals with a race of brutally sadistic alien invaders; and what their God does to the human parson who is the hero of the tale is really drastic! He finally learns that self-reliance is the clue to the salvation of the human race, not reliance on a God Who has rejected it. The tale is a philosophical melodrama, if I ever saw one!

Best of the three, both as to writing and as to believability, is Theodore Sturgeon's nightmare "To Here and the Easel." This is Sturgeon at his flaming best.

In simple essence, he tells, in the first person, the hideous experiences of a schizoid, a split personality in whom the "real" character is a young painter, Giles, who has had to stop painting because of his condition; and the "dream" person is a medieval knight, Rogero, who is involved with battlemented castles, hippogriffs, a heroine named Bradamante and a foul magician called Atlantes. (Those who are well up on their early 16th Century Italian literature may peg those names in advance of Sturgeon's final disclosure. I failed miserably to do so.)

Question: is this madman's fable overwritten? I don't think so, for the blazing prose is saturated with an even more blazing drive or sort of demonic possession. The story is, basically, an unforgettable self-portrait of a man on the verge of insanity, who is rescued by a homely young girl who had faith in him. And it is superb stuff.

ONE IN THREE HUNDRED by J. T. McIntosh. Doubleday and Co., $2.95

THOSE who follow our illustrious competitor, *Fantasy and Science Fiction,* will already have read this moving adventure in three separate novelets in its

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pages. But for those who have not, let it be reported that the book relates the thrilling and tragic story of the exodus of a few thousand human beings from Earth at a time when the Sun is about to go nova.

Part One tells of the difficult task of choosing those among Earth's millions who are to escape; Part Two of the voyage to Mars, which will be their new home; and Part Three of the struggles of the colonists to establish their lives on the new planet—a struggle more against the evils innate in imperfect Man than against the alien conditions of the new world. A distinguished tale.

BRIEF NOTES . . . The Oxford Book Company (no relation to the Oxford University Press) has put out a new item in its "Students Pocket Library" called *Stories of Scientific Imagination* (paper, 70c). It's edited by Joseph Gallant and contains 7 already-anthologized stories (including two by Leinster-Jenkins!) and a 16-page "digest" of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. An odd item, on all counts . . . Bantam Books has *Line To Tomorrow* (25c), a collection of 7 wonderful tales by Lewis Padgett. All have appeared in hard covers before, 4 in Padgett's *A Gnome There Was*. One was originally published under the author's real name, Henry Kuttner. This is pseudonymous hide-and-seek with a vengeance! . . . Also by "Padgett," this time in collaboration with his wife, C. L. Moore, is *Beyond Earth's Gates*, the original-novel-half of a new Ace Books double (35c), here coupled with Miss Andre Norton's *Daybreak — 2250 A.D.* (original title *Starman's Son*). The Padgett-Moore item tells of still another parallel world, much like those which Murray Leinster, Fredric Brown, et al, have already described elsewhere—and, I am afraid, better. However, this is a readable enough tale of an evil theocratic world to which our Earth is "Paradise," and of two young Earth people (one terribly dumb blonde and one "rising young actor") who enter this other world and really tear up the pea-patch there. It's an acceptable time-passer.

—GROFF CONKLIN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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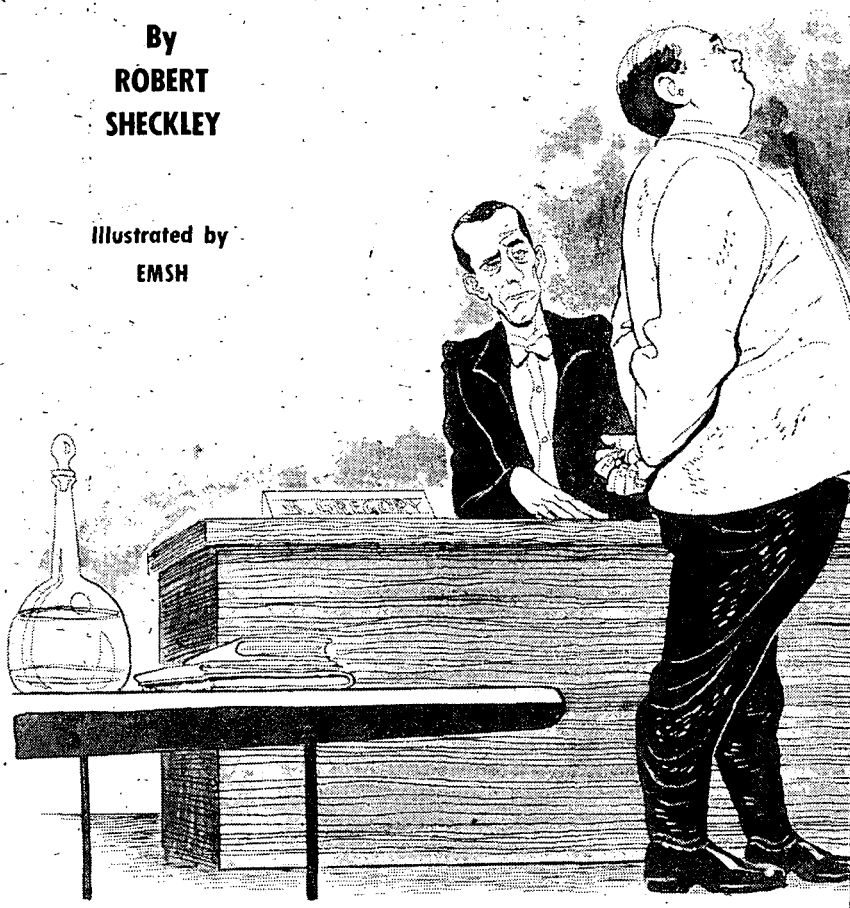
Squirrel Cage

If your planet needs the services of a good exterminator, then call in AAA Ace — but not if it is overrun with anything like slegs!

By
ROBERT
SHECKLEY

Illustrated by
EMSH



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"THE most beautiful farmland in the Galaxy —*ruined!*" the Seerian moaned. He was seven feet tall and colored a deep blue. Large tears rolled out of the lubricating duct on his neck and stained his expensive shirt. For fifteen minutes, he had been mumbling incoherently about his ruined farmland.

"Calm yourself, sir," Richard Gregor said, sitting erect and alert behind his ancient walnut desk. "The AAA Ace Interplanetary Decontamination Service can solve your problem for you."

"Could you tell us the nature of that problem, sir?" Arnold asked.

The Seerian was still choked with emotion. He dried his lubrication duct with a large handkerchief and stared earnestly at the two partners.

"Ruin!" he cried. "That's what I'm facing! The most beautiful farmland—"

"We understand, sir," Gregor said. "But what sort of ruin?"

"I own a farm in Bitter Lug, on the planet Seer," the Seerian said, quieting down with an effort. "I've planted eight hundred mulgs of land with catter, mow and barney. It will sprout inside of a month and the slegs will eat it all. I'll be ruined, destroyed, wiped out—"

"Slegs?" Arnold repeated.

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"Rats, you would call them, of the species Alphyx Drex." The lubrication duct became moist at the thought and the Seerian hastily wiped it. "This year, there has been an infestation of slegs. My land is overrun with them. I've tried everything, but they multiply faster than I can kill them. Gentlemen, I will be fairly wealthy if I can harvest this crop. I will pay well if you can get rid of these beasts."

"I'm sure we can accommodate you," Gregor said. "Of course, there'll have to be a preliminary investigation. We like to know what we're getting into."

"That's what the other companies told me," the Seerian answered bitterly. "There just isn't time. I've invested everything in seed. It'll sprout in a few weeks and the slegs will wipe me out. They must be destroyed before the crop comes through."

GREGOR'S long, bony face became unhappy. He was a conservative operator and he didn't enjoy doing business this way. Because of Arnold's cockiness, AAA Ace had a habit of signing contracts with impossible conditions. Gregor resented it, but it was what came of running a planetary decontamination service on a shoestring. So far, they had been lucky. They were even beginning to show a mild profit. He didn't want to jeopardize that now and the gleam in his partner's eye made him apprehensive.

The Seerian seemed honest enough; but you could never tell. For all Gregor knew, these slegs were ten feet tall and armed with blasters. Stranger things had happened to AAA Ace.

"Have you had any trouble from slegs in the past?" Gregor asked.

"Of course. But they were no more a problem than the flying hangs, or the skegels, or the rotting mulch disease. They were a normal farming hazard."

"Why should they increase now?"

"How should I know?" the Seerian retorted impatiently. "Do you want the job or not?"

"We certainly do," Arnold said, "and we can start—"

"My partner and I must hold a conference first," Gregor cut in, and pulled Arnold into the hall.

Arnold was short, chubby and incurably enthusiastic. His degree was in chemistry, but his interests lay everywhere. He had an enormous amount of odd information, culled from the several dozen technical journals he subscribed to, at considerable expense to AAA Ace.

For the most part, his knowledge was of little practical value. Few people cared why the natives

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of Deneb X were searching for an efficient method of racial suicide, or why nothing but winged life ever evolved on the Drei worlds.

Still, if you *wanted* to know, Arnold could tell you.

"I'd like to find out what we're getting into," Gregor said. "What is species Alphyx Drex?"

"They're rodents," Arnold answered promptly, "a little smaller than Earth rats and more timid. They're vegetarians, living on grains, grasses and soft woods. Nothing unusual about them."

"Hmm. Suppose we find ten million of them?"

"Fine."

"Oh, stop it!"

"I'm serious! If he wanted every one of fifty rats destroyed, I wouldn't take the job. We could spend the rest of our lives hunting down the last five or six. What the Seerian needs is to have the sleg population reduced to its usual pre-epidemic proportions. That we can do and our contract will so state."

Gregor nodded. His partner could—very occasionally—show good business sense.

"But can we control them in time?" he asked.

"Absolutely. There are several modern rodent-control methods. Morganizing is one good way and the Tournier System is another. We'll be able to decimate the rat population in a matter of days."

"All right," Gregor said. "And we'll specify in the contract that we are dealing only with species Alphyx Drex. Then we'll know where we stand."

"Right."

They returned to the office. A contract was drawn up at once, giving AAA Ace a month to rid the farm of the greater number of its slegs. There was a bonus for every day before deadline that the work was completed, and forfeitures for every day past.

"I'm going on vacation until the whole thing is over," the Seerian said. "Do you really think you can save my crops?"

"Don't worry about it," Arnold assured him. "We have Morganizing equipment and we're taking Tournier System apparatus, just in case. Both are very effective."

"I know," the Seerian said. "I tried them. But perhaps I was doing something wrong. Good day and the very best of luck, gentlemen."

Gregor and Arnold stared at the door after the Seerian left.

THE next day, they loaded their ship with a variety of manuals, poisons, traps and other equipment guaranteed to make life difficult for rodents, and blasted off for Seer.

After four days of uneventful travel, Seer was a bright green beneath them. They descended

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and the coastline of Bitter Lug came into view. Finally they pinpointed their coordinates and touched down.

Barney Spirit, as the Seerian's farm was called, was a pretty place, with its neatly plowed fields and grassy meadows. The ancient shade trees were black and stately against the evening sky and twilight made the little reservoir a deep and translucent blue.

The signs of neglect and rodent infestation were everywhere. The great lawns were eaten bare in patches and the trees were drooping and unkempt. Within the farmhouse, the marks of sleg teeth were on furniture, walls, even the big supporting beams.

"He's got his troubles, all right," Arnold said.

"*We've* got his troubles," Gregor corrected.

Their inspection of the farmhouse was accompanied by a continual squealing from slegs hiding just out of sight. As they approached a room, frantic scurryings began; but somehow the slegs vanished into their holes before the partners could see them.

It was too late to begin work, so Arnold and Gregor set up a variety of traps, to find out which would be most effective. They set up their sleeping bags and turned in.

Arnold could sleep through anything, but Gregor spent an extremely uncomfortable night. Battalions and regiments of slegs could be heard running across the floors, banging into tables, biting at the doors and careening off the walls. Just as he was dozing off, an adventurous trio of slegs scampered across his chest. He brushed them off, burrowed lower into his sleeping bag, and managed to catch a few hours of fitful sleep.

In the morning, they inspected their traps and found every one of them empty.

They spent the next few hours dragging the ponderous Morganizing equipment from the ship, assembling it and adjusting the trigger relays and lures. While Arnold was making the last fine adjustments, Gregor unloaded the Tournier System apparatus and ran the field wires around the farm house. They turned both on and sat back to await the slaughter.

Midday came; Seer's hot little sun hung directly overhead. The Morganizing equipment hummed and grumbled to itself. The Tournier wires flashed blue sparks.

Nothing happened.

The hours dragged by. Arnold read every available manual on rodent control. Gregor dug out a pack of tattered cards and morosely played solitaire. The equipment murmured and

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buzzed, exactly as its manufacturers guaranteed. Enough power was consumed to light a medium-sized village.

Not a single rodent corpse was produced.

By evening, it was apparent that slegs were not susceptible to Morganizing or Tournierizing. It was time for dinner and a conference.

"WHAT could make them so elusive?" Gregor puzzled, sitting worriedly on a kitchen chair with a can of self-heating hash.

"A mutation," Arnold stated. "Yeah, that could do it. Superior intelligence, adaptability . . ." Mechanically, Gregor ate his hash. All around the kitchen, he could hear the patter of countless little sleg feet, slipping in and out of holes, staying just out of sight.

Arnold opened an apple pie. "They *must* be a mutation, and a damned clever one. We'd better catch one quick and find out what we're up against."

But catching one was no easier than killing a thousand. The slegs stayed out of sight, ignoring traps, lures, snares and doped bait.

At midnight, Arnold said, "This is ridiculous."

Gregor nodded abstractedly. He was putting the finishing touches on a new trap. It was a large sheet metal box with two sides left invitingly open. If a sleg were foolish enough to enter, a photo-electric cell closed the sides with the speed of a lightning bolt.

"Now we'll see," Gregor said. They left the box in the kitchen and went into the living room.

At two-thirty in the morning, the sides slammed shut.

They hurried in. Within the metal box, they could hear a frantic scurrying and squealing. Gregor turned on the lights and up-ended the box. Although he knew that no rat born could climb the polished sides of the trap, he withdrew the cover with great care, an inch at a time.

The squealing increased.

They eagerly peered into the trap, half prepared to see a rat in full soldier's uniform, waving a white flag.

They saw nothing. The box was empty.

"He couldn't have gotten out!" Arnold exclaimed.

"And he didn't gnaw through. Listen!"

Inside the box, the squealing continued, accompanied by frantic scratching sounds, as though a rat were trying to scramble up the sides of the trap.

Gregor put his hand in and felt cautiously around. "*Ouch!*" He jerked his hand back. There were

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two small toothmarks on his forefinger.

The noise within the empty box increased.

"We seem to have captured an invisible rat," Gregor said blankly.

THE Seerian was vacationing at the Majestic Hotel, in the Catakinny Cluster. It took almost two hours to reach him by interstellar telephone.

Gregor started the conversation by shouting, "You never said anything about invisible slegs!"

"Didn't I?" the Seerian asked. "Careless of me. What about it?"

"It's a breach of contract, that's what!" Gregor yelled.

"Not at all. My lawyer, who happens to be vacationing with me, says that invisibility in animals comes under the classification of Natural Protective Coloration, and therefore need not be mentioned as a hazardous or unique condition. For legal purposes, the courts don't even admit a state of invisibility exists, as long as *some* means of detection is possible. They call it Relative Dimness and it is not allowed as permissible distress in an extermination contract."

Gregor was momentarily stunned.

"We poor farmers must protect ourselves, you know," the Seerian continued. "But I have perfect faith in your ability to cope. Good day."

"He's protected, all right," Arnold admitted, putting down the extension telephone. "If we clean out these invisible rats, he's got a bargain. If we don't, he collects forfeitures."

"Invisible or not," Gregor said, "Morganizing ought to work on them."

"But it doesn't," Arnold pointed out.

"I know. But why doesn't it work? Why don't traps work? Why doesn't the Tournierizing work?"

"Because the rats are invisible."

"That shouldn't matter. They still sniff like rats, don't they? They still hear like rats. They still think like,—*or do they?*"

"Well," Arnold said, "if this invisibility is a true mutational change, it's possible that their sensory apparatus has changed, too."

Gregor frowned. "And a change in their sensory equipment would call for a change in our applied stimulus. Now all we need to know is how these slegs differ from the norm."

"Aside from their invisibility, you mean," Arnold said.

BUT how do you test the sensory apparatus of an invisible rat? Gregor began by constructing a maze out of the Seerian's

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choicer furniture. Its walls were designed to light up when an invisible sleg brushed by. In that way, the rodents' movements could be traced.

Arnold experimented with stains and dyes, searching for something that would return the slegs to visibility. One high-potency dye took momentary hold. A sleg appeared as though by magic, blinking slowly, his nose quivering. He looked at Arnold with maddening calm, then fearlessly turned his back. His rapid metabolic rate converted the dye almost immediately and he faded from view.

Gregor captured ten slegs and tried to run them through his maze. They were unbelievably uncooperative. Most of them refused to move at all. They sniffed disdainfully at the food he gave them, toyed with it a few moments, then ignored it. Even light electric shocks budged them only a few inches.

But the tests did give the answer to the failure of Morganizing and Tournierizing.

Like all large-scale extermination systems, they were based upon the concept of "normal" rodents. These normals could be tricked or scared into certain behavior patterns by stimulation of their hunger or fear drives. It was the norm among rodents that the systems destroyed.

Everything was fine as long as the norm represented a high percentage of the rodent population. But as the slegs had changed, their norm had changed, too. These slegs had adapted to invisibility.

They could no longer be panicked, for they had discovered that nothing chased them. And since they had no reason to flee, they could eat anywhere, at any time. Therefore, they were invariably well fed and in no mood to explore enticing smells, shapes or sounds.

Both Morganizing and Tournierizing *could* be adapted and *would* destroy slegs. But only a few. Only those rodents who had not adapted to invisibility—the unaverage ones. And this only served to reinforce the change in the others.

But what had happened to the natural enemies of the sleg, the forces acting to maintain an ecological balance? In order to find out, Gregor and Arnold made a frantic survey of the fauna of Bitter Lug.

Bit by bit, they reconstructed what must have happened.

The slegs had enemies on Seer —flying hangs, drigs, tree skurls and omenesters. These unimaginative creatures had been unable to cope with the sudden change. For one thing, they were visual hunters, using smell only as an

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auxiliary. Although sleg scent was powerful in their nostrils, *seeing* was believing, not smelling. So they ate each other and left the slegs alone.

And the slegs increased and increased . . .

And AAA Ace could find nothing to check them.

"WE'RE tackling this at the wrong end," Gregor said, after a fruitless week. "We should find out why they became invisible. Then we'd know how to deal with them."

"Mutation," Arnold insisted dogmatically.

"I don't believe it. No animal has ever mutated into invisibility. Why should the slegs be the first?"

Arnold shrugged his shoulders. "Consider the chameleon. There are insects that look like twigs. Other resemble leaves. Some fish can counterfeit the ocean bottom so perfectly—"

"Yes, yes," Gregor said impatiently, "that's camouflage. But invisibility—"

"Some kinds of jellyfish are transparent enough to be considered invisible," Arnold continued. "The hummingbird achieves it by dazzling speed. The shrew hides so well that few humans have ever seen one. All are moving toward invisibility."

"That's ridiculous. Nature equips each creature as best it can. But it never goes all the way by endowing one species with invulnerability from all others."

"You're being teleological," Arnold objected. "You're assuming that nature has some aim in mind, like the overseer of a garden. I maintain that it's a blind averaging process. Sure, the mean usually obtains, but there are bound to be extremes. Nature had to come up with invisibility eventually."

"Now *you're* being teleological. You're trying to tell me that the aim of camouflage is invisibility."

"It must be! Consider—"

"To hell with it," Gregor said wearily. "I'm not even sure what teleology is. We've been here ten days and we've captured some fifty rats, out of a population of several millions. Nothing works. Where do we go from here?"

They sat in silence. Outside, they could hear the scream of a flying hang as it dipped low over the fields.

"If only the slegs' natural enemies had some guts," Arnold said sadly.

"They're visual hunters. If they were—"

He stopped abruptly and stared at Arnold. Arnold looked puzzled for a moment. Then a slow light of comprehension dawned on his face.

"Of course!" he said.

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Gregor lunged for the telephone and called Galactic Rapid Express. "Hello! Listen, this is a rush order . . ."

GALACTIC Rapid Express outdid themselves. Within two days, they deposited ten small boxes on the pocked lawn at Barney Spirit.

Gregor and Arnold brought the boxes inside and opened one. Out stepped a large, sleek, proud, yellow-eyed cat. She was of Earth stock, but her hunting capabilities had been improved with a Lyraxian strain.

She stared somberly at the two men and sniffed the air.

"Don't get your hopes too high," Gregor told Arnold as the cat stalked across the room. "This is outside all normal cat experience."

"Shh," Arnold said. "Don't distract her."

The cat stood, her head cocked delicately to one side, listening to several hundred invisible slegs amble disdainfully past her.

She wrinkled her nose and blinked several times.

"She doesn't like the setup," Gregor whispered.

"Who does?" Arnold whispered back.

The cat took a cautious step forward. She raised a forepaw, then lowered it again.

"She isn't catching on," Gregor said regretfully. "Maybe if we tried terriers—"

The cat suddenly lunged. There was a wild squealing and she was gripping something invisible between her forepaws. She mewed angrily and bit. The squealing stopped.

But other squeals took its place and ratlike shrieks and rodent cries of terror. Gregor released four more cats, keeping the remaining five as his second team. Within minutes, the room sounded like a miniature abattoir. He and Arnold had to leave. The noise was nerve-shattering.

"Time for a celebration," Arnold said, opening one of the brandy bottles he had packed.

"Well," said Gregor, "it's a little early—"

"Not at all. The cats are at work, all's well with the world. By the way, remind me to order a few hundred more cats."

"Sure. But what if the slegs turn cautious again?"

"That's the beauty of it," Arnold said, pouring two stiff shots. "As long as the slegs are this way, they're meat for the cats. But if they revert to their old habits—if they become truly ratlike—we can use the Morganizer."

Gregor could find no argument. The slegs were caught between the cats and the Morganizer. Either way, the place should be

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back to normal in another week, in plenty of time for a sizable bonus.

"A toast to the Earth cat," Arnold proposed.

"I'll drink to that," Gregor said. "To the staunch, down-to-Earth, common-sense Earth cat."

"Invisible rats can't faze her."

"She eats 'em if they're there or not," Gregor said, listening to the sweet music of carnage going on throughout the farmhouse.

THEY drank quite a number of toasts to the various attributes of the Earth cat. Then they drank a solemn toast to Earth. After that, it seemed only proper to toast all the Earth-type suns, starting with Abaco.

Their brandy gave out when they reached Glostrea. Fortunately, the Seerian had a cellar well stocked with local wines.

Arnold passed out while proposing a toast to Wanlix. Gregor managed to last through Xechia. Then he laid his head on his arms and went to sleep.

They awoke late the next day with matching headaches, upset stomachs and flashing pains in the joints. And just to make matters worse, not one of their staunch, down-to-Earth, common-sense Earth cats was to be found.

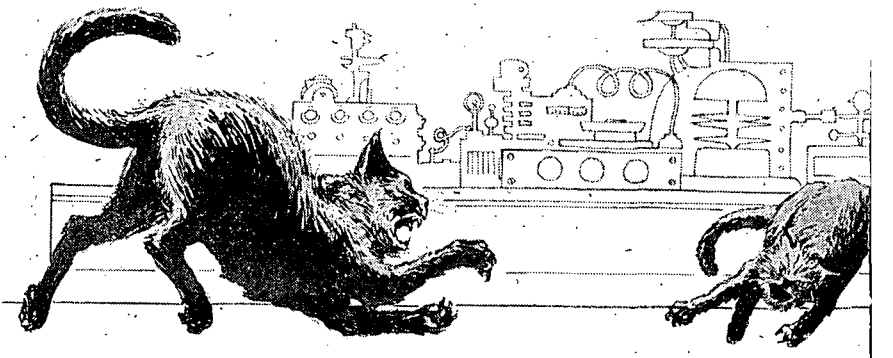
They searched the farmhouse. They looked in the barns, through the meadows, across the fields. They dug up sleg holes and peered into an abandoned well.

There was no sign of a cat—not even a wisp of fur.

On all sides, the slegs scampered merrily by, secure in their cloak of invisibility.

"Just when the cats were doing so well," Arnold mourned. "Do you suppose the slegs ganged up on them?"

"Not a chance," Gregor said. "It would be contrary to all sleg



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behavior. It's more reasonable to assume that the cats just wandered off."

"With all this food here?" Arnold asked. "Not a chance. It would be contrary to all cat behavior."

"Here, kitty, kitty!" Gregor called, for the last time. There was no answering meow, only the complacent squeals of a million careless slegs.

"We must find out what happened," Arnold said, walking to the boxes that housed their remaining five cats. "We'll try again. But this time we'll introduce a control element."

He removed a cat and fastened a belled collar around her neck. Gregor closed the outer doors of the farmhouse and they turned her loose.

SHE went to work with a vengeance and soon the chewed corpses of slegs began to appear, life — and invisibility — drained from them.

"This doesn't tell us anything," Arnold said.

"Keep on watching," Gregor told him.

After a while, the cat took a short nap, a sip of water and began again. Arnold started to doze

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off. Gregor watched, thinking dire thoughts.

Half of their month was now over, Gregor realized, and the sleg population was untouched. Cats could do the job; but if they gave up after a few hours, they would be too expensive to utilize. Would terriers do any better? Or would this happen to any—

He gaped suddenly and nudged Arnold. "*Hey!*" Arnold awoke with a groan and looked.

A moment ago, there had been an extremely busy cat. Now, abruptly, there was only a collar, suspended half a foot above the floor, its little bell tinkling merrily.

"She's become invisible!" Arnold crier. "But how? Why?"

"It must be something she ate," Gregor said wildly, watching the collar dart across the floor.

"All she's eaten is sleg."

They looked at each other with sudden comprehension.

"Then sleg invisibility is *not* mutational!" Gregor said. "I told you so all along. Not if it can be transmitted that way. The slegs must have eaten something, too!"

Arnold nodded. "I suspected it. I suppose, after the cat digests a certain amount of sleg, the stuff takes hold. The cat becomes invisible."

From the bedlam in the room, they could tell that the invisible cat was still devouring invisible slegs.

"They must all still be here," Gregor said. "But why didn't they answer when we called them?"

"Cats are pretty independent," Arnold suggested.

The bell tinkled. The collar, miraculously suspended half a foot above the floor, continued to dart back and forth among the ranks of sleg. Gregar realized that it didn't really matter if the cats couldn't be seen, as long as they continued working.

But while he watched, the tinkle of the bell stopped. The collar was motionless in the middle of the floor for a moment; then it disappeared.

Gregor continued staring at the spot where the collar had been. He was saying, very softly, "It didn't happen. It just didn't happen."

Unfortunately, he knew it had. The cat hadn't jumped, moved, advanced or retreated.

The invisible cat had disappeared.

ALTHOUGH time was drawing short, they knew they would have to start at the beginning and find what was producing the invisibility. Arnold settled into his makeshift laboratory and began to test all substances around the farm. His eyes be-

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came red-rimmed and haggard from long hours of peering into a microscope and he jumped at the slightest sound.

Gregor continued to experiment with the cats. Before releasing number seven, he fitted a tiny radar reflector and radio signal emitter to her collar. She followed the identical pattern of cat number six—after several hours of hunting, she became invisible; shortly after that, she disappeared. Radar showed no trace of her and the radio signal had stopped abruptly.

He tried a more carefully controlled experiment. This time, he put cats eight and nine into separate cages and fed them weighed samples of sleg. They became invisible. He stopped feeding number eight, but continued with nine. Cat number nine disappeared like all the others, leaving no trace. Eight was still invisible, but present.

Gregor had a long argument with the Seerian over the interstellar telephone. The Seerian wanted AAA Ace to forfeit now, at only a small loss, and let one of the bigger companies move in. Gregor refused.

But after the talk, he wondered if he had done the right thing. The secrets at Barney Spirit were deep and involved, and might take him a lifetime to solve. Invisibility was bad enough. But the vanishing was much worse. It left so little to go on.

He was mulling this over when Arnold came in. His partner had a wild look in his eyes and his grin seemed almost demented.

"Look," he said to Gregor, holding out one hand, palm up.

Gregor looked. Arnold's hand was empty.

"What is it?" Gregor asked.

"Only the secret of invisibility, that's all it is," Arnold said with a cackle of triumph.

"But I can't see anything," Gregor answered cautiously, wondering how best to deal with a madman.

"Of course you can't. It's invisible." He laughed again.

Gregor moved back until he had put a table between them. Soothingly, he said, "Good work, old man. That hand of yours will go down in history. Now suppose you tell me all about it."

"Stop humoring me, you idiot," Arnold snapped, still holding out his open hand. "It's invisible, but it's there. Feel it."

GREGOR reached out gingerly. In Arnold's hand was what felt like a bunch of coarse leaves.

"An invisible plant!" Gregor said.

"Exactly. *This* is the culprit."

Arnold had examined every substance on the farm without

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results. One day, he had been walking in front of the house. He had looked again at the bald spots on the pocked lawn. For the first time, it struck him how regularly they were spaced.

He bent down and examined one. It was bare, all right. The dirt showed through.

He touched the spot — and found that he was touching an invisible plant.

"As far as I can tell," Arnold said, "there's an invisible plant of no known species growing in each of those spots."

"But where did they come from?"

"Somewhere Man has never been," Arnold said positively. "I suppose that the progenitor of this species was floating in space, a microscopic spore. Finally it was drawn into the atmospheric orbit of Seer. It fell on the lawn at Barney Spirit, took root, blossomed, threw out seeds — and there we are. We know that slegs eat grasses and their sense of smell is relatively well developed. They probably found this stuff very tasty."

"But it's invisible!"

"That wouldn't bother a sleg. Invisibility is too sophisticated a concept for them."

"And you think all of them ate it?"

"No, not all. But those who did stood the best chance for survival. They were the ones the hangs and drigs didn't pick off. And they transmitted the taste to the next generation."

"And then the cats came in, ate the slegs and got enough of the substance to turn invisible. Fine. But why did they completely vanish?"

"That's obvious," Arnold said. "The slegs ate this plant as just a part of their normal diet. But the cats ate only sleg. They got an overdose."

"Why should an overdose make anything vanish? Vanish to where?"

"Maybe some day we'll find out. Right now, we have a job to do. We'll burn out all the plants. Once the slegs work the stuff out of their systems, they'll become visible again. Then the cats can go to work."

"I just hope it does the job," Gregor said dubiously.

THEY went to work with portable flamethrowers. The invisible plants were easy to spot, since they formed bare spots in the lush green lawns of Barney Spirit. In this instance, invisibility gave them an exceedingly low survival value.

By evening, Gregor and Arnold had burned every one of the plants into ashes.

The next morning, they examined the lawn and were dis-

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concerted to find a new pattern of pock marks. New plants were growing in them, as copiously as before.

"No cause for alarm," Arnold said. "The first bunch must have seeded just before we destroyed them. This crop will be the last."

They spent another day destroying the plants, scorching the entire lawn for good measure. At dusk, a new shipment of cats arrived from Galactic Rapid Express. They kept them caged, waiting for the slegs to return to visibility.

In the morning, more invisible plants were growing on the scorched soil at Barney Spirit. AAA Ace held an emergency conference.

"It's a ridiculous idea," Gregor said.

"But it's the only way left," Arnold insisted.

Gregor shook his head stubbornly.

"What else can we do?" Arnold asked. "Do you have any ideas?"

"No."

"We're only a week from deadline. We'll probably lose part of our profits anyhow. But if we don't complete the job, we're out of business."

ARNOLD set a bowl of invisible plants on the table. "We have to find out where the cats go when they get an overdose."

Gregor stood up and began to pace the floor. "They might show up inside a sun, for all we know."

"That's a risk we have to take," Arnold said sternly.

"All right," Gregor sighed. "Go ahead."

"What?"

"I said go ahead."

"Me?"

"Who else? *I'm* not going to eat that stuff. This was your idea."

"But I can't," Arnold said, perspiring. "I'm the research end of this team. I have to stay here and—uh—collate data. Besides, I'm allergic to greens."

"I'll collate the data this time."

"But you don't know how! I have to work up a few new stains. My flow sheets are all messed up. I've got several solutions cooking in the stove. I'm running a pollenation test on—"

"You're breaking my heart," Gregor said wearily. "All right, I'll go. But this is absolutely the very last time."

"Right you are." Arnold quickly pulled a handful of invisible leaves from the bowl. "Here, eat this. That's it, take some more. What does it taste like?"

"Cabbage," Gregor mumbled, munching.

"I'm sure of one thing," Arnold said. "The effects can't last very long on a creature of your size. Your system should throw off the

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drug in a matter of hours. You'll reappear almost immediately."

GREGOR suddenly became invisible except for his clothes.

"How do you feel?" Arnold asked.

"No different."

"Eat some more."

Gregor ate another double handful of leaves. And, suddenly, he was gone. Clothes and all, he had vanished.

"Gregor?" Arnold called anxiously.

"Are you anywhere around?" Arnold asked.

There was still no answer.

"He's gone," Arnold said out loud. "I didn't even wish him luck."

Arnold turned to his solutions boiling on the stove and lowered the flame under them. He worked for fifteen minutes, then stopped and stared around the room.

"Not that he should need any luck," Arnold said. "There can't be any real danger."

He prepared his dinner. Halfway through it, with a forkful of food poised in front of his mouth, he added, "I should have said good-by."

Resolutely, he put all dark thoughts out of his mind and turned to his experiments. He labored all night and fell exhausted into bed at dawn. In the afternoon, after a hurried breakfast, he continued working.

Gregor had been gone over twenty-four hours.

The Seerian telephoned that evening and Arnold had to assure him that the slegs were nearly under control. It was just a matter of time.

After that, he read through his rodent manuals, straightened his equipment, rewired an armature in the Morganizer, played with a new idea for a sleg trap, burned a new crop of invisible plants and slept again.

When he awoke, he realized that Gregor had been gone over seventy-two hours. His partner might never return.

"He was a martyr to science," Arnold said. "I'll raise a statue to him." But it seemed a very meager thing to do. He should have eaten the plant himself. Gregor wasn't much good in unusual situations. He had courage—no one could deny that—but not much adaptability.

Still, all the adaptability in the world wouldn't help you inside a sun, or in the vacuum of space, or—

He heard a noise behind him, and whirled eagerly, shouting, "Gregor!"

But it was not Gregor.

THE creature who stood before Arnold was about four feet tall and had entirely too many

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limbs. His skin color appeared to be a grayish-pink, under a heavy layer of dirt. He was carrying a heavy sack. He wore a high peaked hat on his high peaked head, and not much else.

"You aren't Gregor, are you?" Arnold asked, too stunned to react properly.

"Of course not," the creature replied. "I'm Hem."

"Oh . . . Have you seen my partner, by any chance? His name is Richard Gregor. He's about a foot taller than I, thin and—"

"Of course I've seen him," Hem said. "Isn't he here?"

"No."

"That's odd. Hope nothing went wrong." He sat down and proceeded to scratch himself intently under three armpits.

Feeling giddy, Arnold asked, "Where do you come from?"

"From Oole, naturally," Hem said. "That's where we plant the scomp. And it comes out here."

"Just a moment." Arnold sat down heavily. "Suppose you start at the beginning."

"It's perfectly simple. For generations, we Oolens have planted the scomp. When the scomp is young, it disappears for a few weeks. Then the mature plant appears again in our fields and we harvest it and eat it."

"You're going too fast for me. Where did you say Oole is?"

"Gregor says Oole is in a parallel universe. I wouldn't know about that. He appeared in the middle of my fields about two months ago and taught me English. Then—"

"Two *months*?" Arnold echoed. He considered. "Different time framework, I suppose. Never mind. Go on."

"Do you have something to eat?" Hem asked. "Haven't eaten in three days. Couldn't, you know." Arnold handed him a loaf of bread and a jar of jam. "Well, when they opened the new North Territory," Hem said, "I put in an early bid. So I packed my animals, purchased three class B wives and departed for my claim. Once there, I—"

"Stop!" Arnold begged. "What has this got to do with anything?"

"This is how it all happened. Don't interrupt."

SCRATCHING his left shoulder with one hand while stuffing bread and jam in his mouth with two others, Hem explained, "I reached the new territory and planted scomp. It blossomed and disappeared, as always. But when it reappeared, most of it had been consumed by some creature. Well, farmers have to expect trouble, so I planted again. The next crop was still too poor to harvest. I was furious. I de-

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termined to continue planting. We pioneers are a determined lot, you understand. But I was just about to give up and return to civilization when your partner came—"

"Let me see if I understand so far," Arnold said. "You are from a universe parallel to ours. This scomp you plant grows in *two* universes, in order to complete its development."

"That's correct—at least it's how Gregor explained it to us."

"It seems an odd way to grow food."

"We like it," the Oolen said stiffly. He scratched behind all four knees. "Gregor says that our plants usually penetrate some uninhabited part of your universe. But this time, when I sowed in new territory, the scomp came up here."

"Aha!" Arnold cried.

"Aha? He didn't teach me that word. Anyhow, Gregor helped me. He told me I didn't have to abandon my land; I just had to use my other fields. Gregor assures me that there is no one-to-one spatial correspondence between parallel universes, whatever that means. And this is in payment for our other business."

Hem dropped the heavy sack on the floor. It made a loud clunk as it landed. Arnold opened it and peered inside.

The bars of yellow metal looked exactly like gold ingots.

Just then, the telephone rang. Arnold picked it up.

"Hello," Gregor said, from the other end. "Is Hem there yet?"

"Yes . . ."

"He explained it all, didn't he? About the parallel universe and how the scomp grows?"

"I think I understand," Arnold said. "But—"

"Now listen," Gregor continued. "Before, when we destroyed the plants, he sowed them again. Since his time is much longer than ours, they grew here overnight. But that's over. He's moving his fields. The next time you destroy the scomp, it'll stay destroyed. Wait a week, then turn the cats and the Morganizer loose."

Arnold shut his eyes tightly. Gregor had had two months to figure all this out. He hadn't. It was happening too fast for him.

"What about Hem?" he asked.

"He'll eat some scomp and go home. We had to starve it out of ourselves to get here."

"All right," Arnold said. "I think I—just a minute! *Where are you?*"

Gregor chuckled. "There's no one-to-one correspondence between parallel universes, you know. I was standing on the edge of the field when the scomp wore off. I came out on the planet Thule."

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"But that's on the other side of the Galaxy!" Gregor gasped.

"I know. I'll meet you back on Earth. Be sure to bring the gold."

Arnold hung up. Hem had gone.

It was only then that Arnold realized he hadn't asked Gregor what the other business was, the business that the Oolen had paid for in solid gold.

HE found out later, when they were both back on Earth, in the offices of AAA Ace. The job was done. The slegs, returned to visibility, had been decimated by the cats and the Morganizer. Their contract was completed. They had to forfeit part of their profit, because the job ran two weeks overtime, but the loss was more than made good by the bars of Oolen gold.

"His fields were overrun with our cats," Gregor told Arnold. "They were scaring his livestock. I rounded them all up and we sold them to the Oole Central Zoo. They never saw anything like them. He and I split the take."

"Well," Arnold said, rubbing the back of his neck, "it all worked out for the best."

"It certainly did."

Gregor was ferociously scratching his shoulder. Arnold watched for a moment, then felt a strong itching sensation on his chest—in his hair—on his calf—everywhere.

Carefully, he reached down and probed with his fingernails.

"I guess we aren't quite through, though," Gregor said.

"Why?" Arnold asked, scratching at his left biceps. "What is this?"

"Hem wasn't the most hygienic of people and Oole was a pretty scrubby place."

"*What is it?*"

"I'm afraid I picked up a lot of lice," Gregor said. He scratched at his stomach. "Invisible lice, of course."

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

FORECAST

Hmm, not much room to tell you about next month's issue—except that it leads off with HELPFULLY YOURS, a long novelet by Evelyn E. Smith, who is astonished to find herself becoming one of the top writers of science fiction. You'll see why, though, when she shows how. "Come down to Earth—and stay there!" is a humiliating order for someone with wings.

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